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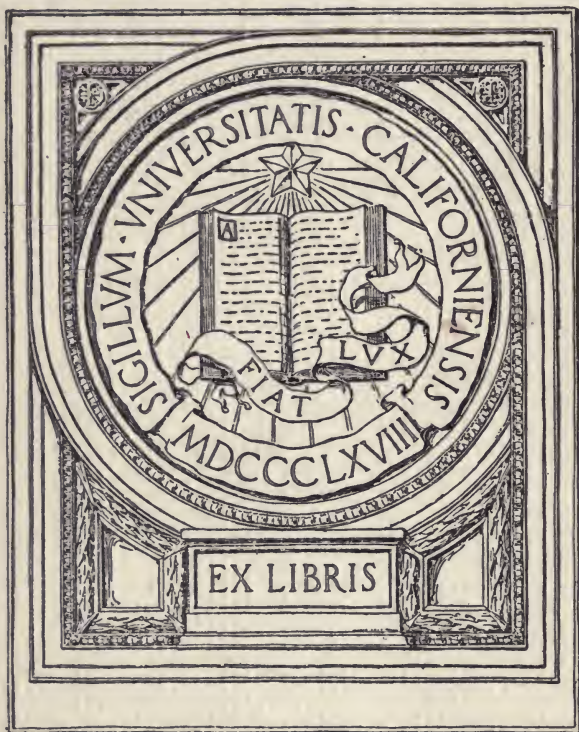


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# How to Read POETRY

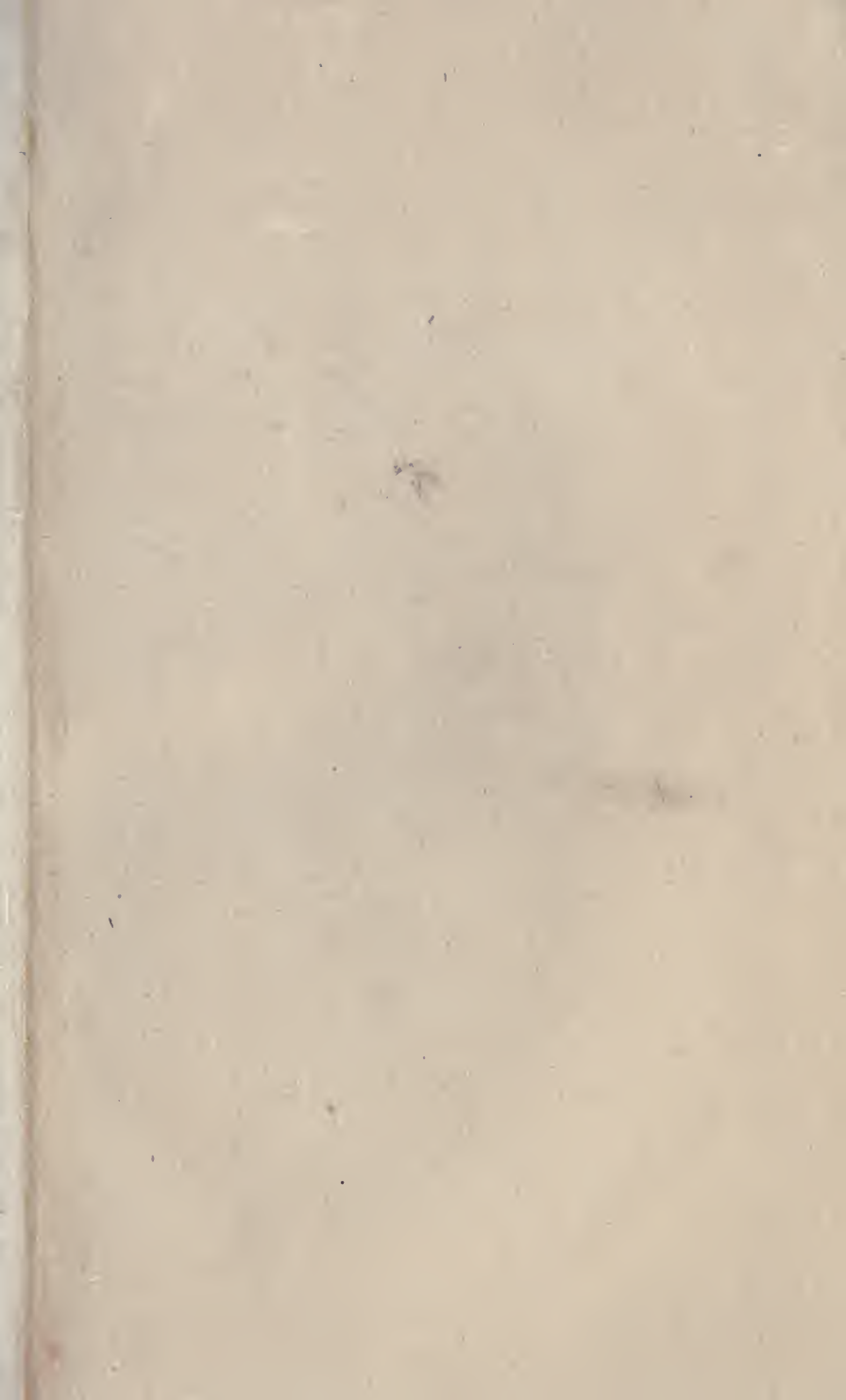
Ethel M. Colson

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**HOW TO READ  
POETRY**



# How to Read Poetry

BY  
ETHEL M. COLSON

*The magic light that springs  
From the deep soul of things  
When, called by their true name,  
Their essence is set free;  
The work, illuminate,  
Showing the soul's estate,  
Baring the hearts of men;  
Poetry!*

ANNIE LAURETTE LANEY



CHICAGO  
A. C. McCLURG & CO.

1918

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1918

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Published November, 1918

*English alumnus*

To  
My dear Mother

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## FOREWORD

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It may be plainly stated, in beginning, that this little book is in no sense a didactic or technical treatise, that it sheers humbly far away from the academic or educational religion. Textbooks, conveying formal poetic information, offering best and most incontrovertible of studious reasons for the why and how of poetry reading, are thicker than flowers in May or sad hearts in war time, but here is no hint of addition to their number.

The best argument that can be advanced in favor of marriage is that marriage has been found happy. The best of all reasons for reading poetry is because one loves it. And the best way to read poetry is with the love that, for love's sake, finds its own pathway, works its own miracles of sympathy and understanding.

The simple intent, therefore, of "How to Read Poetry" is to assist the lay poetry lover—far more numerous and universal

## *Foreword*

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than might be imagined—to comprehend and, if necessary, defend his affection; to remove the curse too widely laid by scholastic injunctions and “required reading;” to persuade the non-poetic reader who, for whatever reason, believes that he does not like poetry that at heart he really does.



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# HOW TO READ POETRY

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## I REMEMBER, I REMEMBER

I remember, I remember  
The house where I was born,  
The little window where the sun  
Came peeping in at morn;  
It never came a wink too soon,  
Nor brought too long a day;  
But now I often wish the night  
Had borne my breath away.

I remember, I remember,  
The roses red and white,  
The violets and the lily-cups,  
Those flowers made of light!  
The lilacs where the robins built,  
And where my brother set  
The laburnum on his birthday,—  
The tree is living yet!

I remember, I remember,  
Where I was used to swing,  
And thought the air must rush as fresh  
To swallows on the wing;  
My spirit flew in feathers then  
That is so heavy now,  
The summer pool could hardly cool  
The fever on my brow.

I remember, I remember,  
The fir trees dark and high,  
I used to think their slender spires  
Were close against the sky:  
It was a childish ignorance,  
But now 'tis little joy  
To know I'm farther off from Heaven  
Than when I was a boy.

— Thomas Hood.

## CHAPTER I

### WHY READ POETRY?

**W**HY read poetry? Because you love it. Because every human being, at some time, in some form, under some conditions, feels and rejoices in the poetic impulse.

Why? Ask some mighty oracle, some omniscient authority. We are dealing with effects, not causes, with undying and world-wide facts.

Proof? Of the simplest. The lyric love, the lyric voice, was born with humanity. It has persisted and proclaimed in all ages. Never a tribe, a race, a nation but has had its own special, individual poets and songs.

To pass to concrete examples, the child who cared nothing for Mother Goose rhymes would—should—be accorded immediate medical attention; the little girl who crooned not to her dolls, the little boy who never gave vent to more or less melodious notes and cries and calls would be unthinkable. The



college youth, the man of affairs, punctuates his enthusiasms by rhythmic, frequently rhyming "yells" and "slogans," the old folk comfort lonely or stimulate dreamy age by recalling half-forgotten songs and ballads and chanteys. For yourself, good sir or madam —

Which do you remember best and most easily, the prose proverb or the poetic admonition, the uncadenced "ad." or the cadenced appeal of the "Spotless Town" jingles and kindred? For specific illustration:

American cities, some years ago, were flooded by advertisements of a rubberized article whose virtues were acclaimed somewhat after this manner:

Washable, dryable,  
Durable, pliable;  
Pardon the English, but  
Isn't it tryable?

Few now, perhaps, could give, offhand, the name or nature of the advertised commodity. All memory of the article advertised, all faintest recollection of its maker and character may have been swept from the casual mind

by the obliterating waves of busy living, but — the jingle lingers.

And proves a point that in many ways, natural and scientific, may be firmly pressed home.

Hickory, dickory dock,  
The mouse ran up the clock,  
The clock struck one, the mouse ran down,  
Hickory, dickory dock!

How many millions of delighted youngsters have been saddled for life with the burden of this simple ditty who, two seconds after hearing the unadorned statement that "The mouse ran up the clock and down again," would have forgotten all about it? How many millions have preserved through life conscious or subconscious recollection of the not entirely dissimilar legend concerning the unknown "King of France" who, "with all his thousand men," performed not entirely dissimilar evolutions in regard to the "hill" and the "swords" so fruitlessly ascended and drawn?

What makes the jingles so long, so irresist-

ibly, remembered? The rhythm, good friends, the rhythm!

Pursue the thought a little further. Doesn't expression count for almost as much as material, manner weigh almost as heavily as matter, with most of us? Be outspoken, be honest! Doesn't it sometimes mean more? At all events, and duly observing all conservative proprieties, the way in which a given thing is said surely matters much, at least in the way of resultant impression.

Lovelace, "going to the wars" and informing his fair lady that "Because I am honorable, dear, I am able to love you so much," would have affected an utterance to which, in all probability, even the cherished Lucasta would have paid little attention.

I could not love thee, Dear, so much  
Loved I not Honor more,

made the sentiment unforgettable and Lovelace famous. The beauty of the thought is enriched by beauty of setting, the charm of verbal music fixes the idea that, less impressively presented, soon would be swept away.

Why, to impale this thought irretrievably, do we remember "Mandalay" so easily, long and lovingly? Because of the swelling swing and sway that frame, to indulge in excusable mixing of metaphors, the vivid picture.

"Poetry," it has been well said, "is emotion recollected in tranquillity." But poetry also is emotion recollected — and reflected — in and by the lilt and swell of song.

Here, then, are two basic and admirable reasons for reading poetry. Poetry, nay, even "verse and worse" as Lamb had it, may make eternal beauty that might otherwise be evanescent, may help, cause, compel us to preserve "beyond chance of change" joys that are in themselves of fleeting order.

But poetry does more. It quickens and inspires the sense of beauty, surely never more needed than at present. We may not all write poetry (though almost everybody does, nowadays, and though certain happy poets believe that children should be taught poetic forms, as the elements of music, with creative possibilities under prospective consideration), but we can all read it. And in the reading of



poetry, like virtue "its own exceeding rich reward," we can enjoy all manner of delightful thrills and impulses and vicarious sentiments and emotions even more easily than at the "movies." The joy of reading poetry, as practical, legitimate and reasonable as that of the stage or painting, consists largely in the increased power of making or realizing—visualizing—mental pictures.

"My mind to me a kingdom is," "I wandered lonely as a cloud," "Over the hills and far away," "The groves were God's first temples," what hosts of lovely images rise in response to these and other beautiful phrases! What vivid, varied, glorious "phantoms of delight" are evoked by repetition, recollection of countless well-loved stanzas, poems, lines!

"We can hear without emotion of a child slain in war so long as we merely understand the fact without imagining," says Brian Hooker, himself a true and delicate poet, discussing "The Practical Use of Poetry;" "but the moment we imagine such a thing, we begin to feel. . . . Poetry is



not alone our common repository of past experience, but to a degree far greater than we realize our source of present action.

. . . . The facts of life change and falsify and pass utterly away, but the truth is poetry and shall prevail."

Because our feelings, and manner of feeling, yes, even in war time, are as prone to become standardized, to get into ruts, as our physical habits, anything that aids, induces feeling of right, of keen, of uplifting order is of truest value to mankind.

Who, for commonplace, realistic example, has not redeemed, transfigured a dripping day through thought or repetition of some poem by magic of words transmuting the gloom into beauty? Dripping days recurring frequently in the lives of most humans, such poems are many and varied. Of the popular order most fitting in present connection, Riley's "Why, rain's my choice" and Loveman's "It isn't raining rain to me" spring to mind most readily. Equally inspiring, if less famous, is Mabel Earle's lovable "Rainy Days."

Dear Lord, shall I remember up in  
Heaven

How all the world grows sweet when  
leaves are wet,

How the warm summer rain is dashed  
and driven

Across my beds of fern and migno-  
nette?

Shall I remember there, when angels  
wander

Shining, across Thy fields and singing  
still,

How the wind sways the willow branches  
yonder,

And the rain murmurs over field and  
hill?

Shall I remember there, in Heaven, be-  
holding

The light that rises not, nor sets, nor  
pales,

How all this day the mists are folding,  
folding,

Saintly and white, along the silent  
vales?

When all the Heavenly courts are  
hushed and holy  
With Thy deep peace, that stills the  
sound of praise,  
Will it be like the benediction lowly  
Breathed in the blessedness of rainy  
days?

Isn't anything worth while that puts such glory into nature for those who, so unchallenged, scarce might note the gray wonder, the soft, dim loveliness of wet weather? Edith Franklin Wyatt, in "City Whistles," "City Vespers," "A City Swallow," and "November in the City," performs a kindred miracle in behalf of the busy townsmen to whom thronging streets and metropolitan bustle too often suggest only the harder and harsher aspects of trade and barter, her inspiring contemporary note but echoing those of many other city singers and purveyors of poetic magic. Hood, Wordsworth, Towne, Kilmer, Howells, it were vain to dream of enumerating those who have thus provided sight for the poetically blind.

Poems about roads, the sea, the fields, the forest, the desert, the prairies, the mountains are many and beloved as humanity's passion for travel, as the wanderlust that redeems from cloddish inertia countless comfort-clogged children of modernity. The mighty underlying impulses of love, death, sin, and sorrow are interpreted, softened, hallowed, by unnumbered and many-veined poems and lyrics, the persistent if sometimes belittled appeal of Tennyson or Longfellow or Whittier or Wordsworth lies in their power of evoking sympathetic feeling, of visioning vivid pictures, of turning to black and gold and rainbow colorings the universal life figments and pigments more commonly presented as dingy, dreary, drab.

Poetry, moreover, not only makes us feel, but makes us feel in universal manner. "The Colonel's lady and Julia O'Grady are sisters under their skins" is Kipling's way of expressing a truth we must all realize upon occasion. Needless to say the Colonel himself and Julia's husband are of equally intrinsic kinship. Poetry, wide as the world, flexible as



the winds, fluid as water, not only expresses but interprets for the inarticulate the great general human emotions. It says for us things that few of us can say for ourselves, that, in naked prose, few of us would say were the saying conventionally possible. It endows the emotionally dumb with vicarious eloquence, it lends to the unlettered the gift of strange tongues.

Through the medium of poetry the voiceless, whose most fervent moods and emotions must remain personally unexpressed, who perhaps never have been blessed with fervent moods and emotions, may rejoice in the simple sweetness of "Annie Laurie," the kindly power of all old and new heroes, the splendid pride and prowess of all those through all the ages celebrated in enshrining song.

The childless, the bereaved woman may live through experiences never directly her own in the lullabies and child poems quick with the sacred mother impulse; the desolate may find the lost grace of gladness, the sustenance of faith in lyrics hymning the joyous hope of others.



The lame, the halt, the blind may know the bliss of open space, wide skies, free motion. The prisoned may delight in sea and land and mountains. Even the soldier heart shut in the inadequate body may share the thrills of the fighter. The aged may be youthful, the timid may be brave.

All this through prose too? Yes, but in lessened, inferior measure. "Friendship," runs the wise French proverb, "is love without wings." Just so, prose sentiment too often is wingless. Poetry is capable of wondrous flights, usually, even when of uninspired variety, can fly a little, at least can suggest the illusion of leaving prosaic earth behind.

That's why we all love it—for surely, now, you willingly admit the prevailing love and need of poetry. From the minstrels of earliest antiquity down to the newest of "new poetry" singers, the poet's public always has been more or less assured him, though not always during his lifetime. Successful magazine editors are quite cognizant of the general fondness for poetry. Magazine verses

are not printed to solve the "filler" problem alone.

And that's why—because we all love poetry—that all of us read poetry upon occasion and should read it. That's why the classic poets never go out of fashion, why new ones come into fashion continually. Passing by all the stock (and standard) arguments for reading poetry because of its good effect upon prose writing, for its cultural value or other educational, bread and butter reasons we read poetry—yes, all of us at one time or another!—because we love it—unless, indeed, something is wrong with our loving apparatus.

We may not, of course, all love the same kinds of poetry; to do so would be as regrettable as for all to love the same kinds of food or friends. But if we don't love some kind of poetry it's because we're not normal or because we're not reading or choosing aright.

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## INVICTUS

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the  
scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.

—William Ernest Henley.

## CHAPTER II

### WHAT DO WE SEEK IN POETRY?

**E**NJOYMENT, of course. (Was it not agreed in the beginning that only the "happy reasons" for reading poetry should be considered? Let those who will read poetry for purposes of education or culture or conversational utility. We are concerned alone with poetry reading for the sake of fun.)

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Enjoyment, then, is our object in poetry, albeit, as J. B. Kerfoot sagely says, "One can learn more about poetry from watching its squirms than from all the pronouncements of all the pundits." And — let it be said quickly, before countless puzzled or dissentient voices deafen with question or denial — enjoyment in the reading of poetry is possible to every man, woman, and child in existence. Not, of course, as previously suggested, the same kind of enjoyment, nor, for that matter, the same kind of poetry. Far from it. Enjoy-



ment as dissimilar, as diverse, as infinitely varied as human nature or as poetry itself.

One of the most potent causes of the long supposed unpopularity of poetry lies in the fact that poetry almost universally is read and studied with so little discrimination, such careless selection, such slight attention to personal tendencies and taste. Another lies in the fancy, frequent as absurd, that "good" poetry, of whatever nature, must prove equally pleasing to all tasteful readers, whereas, human nature being cast into an infinite variety of shapes and patterns, the exact reverse is — and should be — true.

There are as many good kinds of poetry — or kinds of good poetry — as there are of good music or good pictures. The lilting ballad may be as fine in its way as a Beethoven sonata; the simplest of lyrics in its own field may rank as high as, in another, Dante's "Inferno" or "Paradise Lost."

Who would condemn a beautiful landscape, an entertaining cartoon, because it was neither a portrait nor a still-life study? Where would be the sense of condemning art

or the art lover because a certain style of painting made no appeal to a single observer, of deprecating all dramatic productions because comedy—or tragedy—failed of personal charm or application? Yet such practice would be quite as sensible as to decide that one did not like or enjoy poetry because certain varieties lacked the power to hold or please.

Frost's grave stories, Lindsay's spirited trumpet-tones, Harriet Monroe's polished and tender thoughtfulness, Sara Teasdale's poignant purity of mood and meter all, to point the moral by present favorites, are excellent, each in its own manner, but their virtue, by reason of their very individuality, is by no means identical or synchronous. Different kinds of poetry, as different poets, suit differing temperaments, mentalities, times of life, or the day.

Poetry, then, should be read, selected, fitted to the person and mood as reasonably as books or clothes or games or articles of diet. The eager prospective bridegroom might not, for the moment, find Bryant's "Thanatopsis"

or Scott's "Lady of the Lake" absorbing, but Christopher Morley's "Songs for a Little House," while of lesser abstract value, might prove quick with fascination. Because a piquant anecdote about the last-named collection of verse suits so aptly it shall be quoted here.

"I don't suppose you care for poetry," a Morley admirer is reported as remarking to a man who had always believed in the veracity of the suggestion, "but," receiving the expected negative, "you live in a little house, doubtless you are fond of your wife, you have chairs, a table, and, in all probability, a cat. I believe you are the proud father of a son, and it is likely that you sometimes stoke the furnace. Now just let me read you a bit of this."

"That's not poetry," the unconscious convert exclaimed, presently, "that's just reading"—which assertion, incidentally, has been made against Masters, Milton, and many another poet "old" and "new."

So, too, with the man who in time of peace cared little for war poetry, but who now, with



all the world thrilling to the war-call, reads all the war poetry he encounters. So, again, with the woman who, from the widened viewpoint of happy or bereaved mother, suddenly finds lullabies and poems of childhood irresistible. So, yet again, with the adolescent youth or maiden one day considering love poems "silly rot" the next day devouring them avidly, if in secret. Who—but why continue? Complete the argument by recalling the kind of poems, verses, jingles you clipped and tucked away in pocketbook or bureau drawer between your fifteenth and twentieth birthdays, by considering the kind of poetry you clip and tuck away (for everyone does it sometimes) nowadays.

The finest of skating songs would have but slight appeal in a northern blizzard, but who, in such circumstance, could resist a June poem? Think, for a moment, and for example, upon Richard Henry Stoddard's "The Flight of Youth."

There are gains for all our losses,  
There are balms for all our pain,

But when youth, the dream, departs,  
It takes something from our hearts,  
And it never comes again.

We are stronger, and are better  
Under manhood's sterner reign,  
Still, we feel that something fleet  
Followed youth with flying feet,  
And will never come again.

Something beautiful has vanished  
And we sigh for it in vain.  
We behold it everywhere,  
In the earth and in the air,  
But it never comes again.

Now, if you are on the hither side of forty those haunting lines probably appear to you as only academically graceful and tender. Perhaps, even, the thought embodied seems rather like sentimental if not stupid nonsense. But if you are on the other side of forty, or if, for any reason, the flight of time has been pressed home to you, the almost inevitable reaction will be that of keen appreciation,



touched with quick resentment or gently responsive sadness. If the "arid tableland of middle life" looms vaguely near, or if it lies so far behind as to have lost all sting and sadness, quite another kind of enjoyment, that of satisfied recognition, will follow the reading. At all events, it is evident that spontaneous, superlative emotional pleasure scarce could follow successive reading of the quoted poem and of, for instance, Anne Higginson Spicer's "Song of an April Fool."

Across the fields I laugh and run.  
I toss my heart up to the sun  
And catch it back in my two hands.  
All girdled round with golden bands  
It is, and chains of sunny beams  
That glitter like my childish dreams.

And if the day is filled with mist,  
What care have I? Where-e'er I list  
I run and breathe soft depths of dew,  
And feel the soft damp soak me through  
Until my heart swells like a seed  
And bursts to very bloom, indeed.

There may be those who keep a state  
Of dignity, and walk sedate,  
Who do not laugh, and do not care  
To meet Young April debonair  
And smiling, like some shepherd swain  
Who greets his love, or sun or rain.

Poor fools, I'll let them go their way  
Unmindful of the April day.  
There must be something that they prize  
More than these rainbow April skies.  
They shall not daunt me as I run  
And toss my heart up to the sun.

Nor could the mood sympathetic to this bit of nature-love incarnate, to Browning's "Pippa Passes," to Masfield's sea poems prove equally sympathetic to many another and equally depictive poem of nature. Take, for example, Sidney Lanier's "Ballad of Trees and the Master" and Joyce Kilmer's "Trees." Here are two lovely poems, each written in praise of trees, each instinct with deep and simply expressed feeling, each intrinsically reverent in tone and expression,

yet what leagues, what eternities apart in the essential verities that distinguish, differentiate them! Lanier is most concerned with the Master, Kilmer with the trees, and this divergence of creative mood must arouse equally marked divergence of sympathy and comprehension on the part of the reader. Lanier is the greater poet, doubtless, but is there not something even more widely appealing, because more widely human, about the simple Kilmer lines:

I think that I shall never see  
A poem lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest  
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;

A tree that looks at God all day,  
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

A tree that may in Summer wear  
A nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain;  
Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,  
But only God can make a tree.

Poems of trees and woods are almost as numerous, as beloved as poems of the road and the joys of travel, and for the simplest, most understandable of reasons. Woods and trees and roads bulk large in the life, at least in the imaginative enjoyment, of almost every human being. But poems of woods and trees and roads must be vastly varied if they are to range widest popular scope. So, too, moreover, with all the unending poetic variants upon the best loved human themes.

Courage, to illustrate, is a virtue that all men, all women, agree to admire, exalt. Herein lies the spell of certain much quoted poems. It has been related that upon canvass of a large and fairly representative gathering of men Henley's intrepid "Invictus" was drawn from several hundred pockets or honored by several hundred mouths as the favorite poem of each person voting. These men loved "Invictus" because it expressed a thought, a theory, an attitude they had long



and deeply adored in less articulate manner. Many women might like the idea without caring for the form of the Henley challenge. Few brave, experienced women, perhaps, could resist the subtle charm of Margaret Widdemer's "A Cyprian Woman."

Under dusky laurel leaf,  
Scarlet leaf of rose,  
I lie prone, who have known  
All a woman knows —

Love and grief and motherhood,  
Fame and mirth and scorn;  
These are all shall befall  
Any woman born.

Jewel-laden are my hands,  
Tall my stone above;  
Do not weep that I sleep  
Who was wise in love;

Where I walk a shadow gray  
Through gray asphodel,  
I am glad, who have had  
All that Life could tell.



Because few women, however brave, however experienced, have known "all a woman knows" the underlying, delicately suggested sense of adventure, the hint of poignant pain and passion incident to this "second epitaph for Bilitis" will leave many a staid feminine reader glad or gasping. Masculine readers, on the other hand, may find it dull or repellent, might unhesitatingly declare against more than surface virtue or beauty in the poem's connection. Other, deeper poems relating to death might affect them far more strongly. Yet the appeal, the message of Sir Edwin Arnold's "He who died at Azan sends," Wordsworth's "Our life is but a sleep and a forgetting," and Alan Seeger's "I Have a Rendezvous with Death" might not be at all synonymous. Matthew Arnold's classic "Strew on her roses, roses" has quickened to delicious thrilling many whom the following sister-lyric might leave unstirred and cold.

Here she lies where all must come,  
After the days grow wearisome,  
She that was Chrysanthemum.

Tulips falter in the wind;  
With blown leaves her eyes are blind,  
And her singing mouth is dumb.  
Here she lies where all must come.

Lotus flower between her breasts  
Rests as deeply as she rests;  
Milky veil about her rolled  
Feels seeds quicken in its fold:—  
Here she lies where all must come.

Little feet that danced so light  
Music shall not stir tonight,  
Though the strongest love of men  
Lilted on the samisen.  
Little hands men's hearts that led  
Into snares that she had spread  
After days grown wearisome—

Little hands shall know no more  
Closing door or opening door,  
Keys of sorrow or of grief;  
Lo! they hold a withered leaf.  
World, and where is thy distress?  
One chrysanthemum the less!

World, what say'st thou? She is dumb,  
She that was Chrysanthemum.

So, again, in regard to any or all of the countless tastes, devotions, idiosyncrasies, enthusiasms variously delighting the children of men. Poetry there is for the pleasing of all, poetry capable of infinite variety of selection. Art lovers, for example, to the end of time will swear by the Kenyon Cox creed beginning "Work thou for pleasure," or that charming figuration of Edith M. Thomas, "Of old the muses sat on high——"

Lovers and friends of humanity's "little brethren," dogs and cats, will never tire of songs and sonnets that celebrate the goodness and graces of these faithful or faithless dwellers by the hearthstone or doorstep.

The religiously inclined—and who, at heart, in secret, does not incline toward some kind or form of religion?—will ever find in religious poetry recurrent joy and strength and solace. To the religious, as the loving, the poems of Christina Rossetti always have meant a very special delectation, as have the

poems of Francis Thompson, Alice Meynell, and other religious singers. And so the tale goes on.

Down—or up—or around—the entire list or gamut of human experience the poetry-pleasure trail might be followed, but sufficient illustrations have been provided for the satisfaction of any open-minded, unprejudiced reader. Any such who have followed the thought-thread of the outlined thesis will be ready to admit universal enjoyment of poetry, pleasure in poetry reading—always, be it again understood, if matter be properly suited to mood, material to situation. Dickens formulated the facts in regard to poetry reading when he caused R. Wilfer to excuse or explain his tragic wife to their daughter.

“Supposing . . . . that a man wanted to be always marching, he would find your mother an inestimable companion. But if he had any taste for walking, or should wish at any time to break into a trot, he might sometimes find it difficult to keep step with your mother. Or take it this way, Bella, . . . . supposing that a man had to go



through life, we won't say with a companion, but we'll say to a tune. Very good. Supposing that the tune allotted to him was the 'Dead March' in 'Saul.' Well. It would be a very suitable tune for particular occasions—none better—but it would be difficult to keep time with in the ordinary run of domestic transactions. For instance, if he took his supper after a hard day, to the 'Dead March' in 'Saul,' his food might be likely to set heavy on him. Or, if he was at any time inclined to relieve his mind by singing a comic song or dancing a hornpipe, and was obliged to do it to the 'Dead March' in 'Saul,' he might find himself put out in the execution of his lively intentions."

Exactly. It need not be said again that herein lies the secret of reading poetry with enjoyment: suit the poetry to the needs and uses of the time.

Is your mood solemn? Don't read tripping ballads, sentimental triolets, gay vers de société, stirring war songs or even Edmund Vance Cooke's bracing "Impertinent Poems."

Are you in love? Peruse all the love lyrics and epithalamiums available, but seek not to



stay your soul with the biting sarcasm of Masters or the bludgeon strokes of Sandburg. As well, when hungry, regale one's self with whipped cream or, when throbbing with the joy of life, curb your steps to some stately chant or dirge.

Read poetry, in a word, as sensibly, honestly, as you eat or drink or dress or dream or talk or sleep or plan for the future. Then there'll be no more nonsense about not enjoying poetry.

For whoso reads poetry in accordance with these suggestions no more could avert resultant enjoyment than he could leap into the air and fly.

## THE TOYS

My little Son, who looked from thoughtful  
eyes

And moved and spoke in quiet grown-up  
wise,

Having my law the seventh time disobeyed,

I struck him, and dismissed

With hard words and unkissed,

—His Mother, who was patient, being  
dead.

Then, fearing lest his grief should hinder  
sleep,

I visited his bed,

But found him slumbering deep,

With darkened eyelids, and their lashes  
yet

From his late sobbing wet.

And I, with moan,

Kissing away his tears, left others of my  
own;

For, on a table drawn beside his head,

He had put, within his reach,  
A box of counters and a red-veined stone,  
A piece of glass abraded by the beach,  
And six or seven shells,  
A bottle with bluebells,  
And two French copper coins, ranged  
there with careful art,  
To comfort his sad heart.  
So when that night I prayed  
To God, I wept, and said:  
Ah, when at last we lie with trancèd  
breath,  
Not vexing Thee in death,  
And thou rememberest of what toys  
We made our joys,  
How weakly understood  
Thy great commanded good,  
Then, fatherly not less  
Than I whom Thou has molded from  
the clay,  
Thou'lt leave Thy wrath, and say,  
"I will be sorry for their childishness."  
— Coventry Patmore.

## CHAPTER III

### THE "OLD" POETRY, SO-CALLED

THE term "old" poetry is here used, purely as a convenience, because of the recent popular division of poetry into the supposedly "old" and "new" varieties. But to speak of "old" poetry in reality is as absurd as it would be to speak, in the same sense, of "old" sky or "old" sea or "old" sunshine or any other general and universal characteristic or quality of creation. For the poetry now known as "old" is as ageless, deathless, perpetual, and eternal as any of the powers of nature noted. It began with the earliest dawns and stirrings of humanity; it will persist, endure, as long as the human race.

Even Miss Amy Lowell, avowed and accredited apostle of the "new" school of poetry, in "Tendencies in Modern American Poetry" admits that "Good poetry, if not strikingly great poetry, marked the epoch



of Whittier, Bryant, Emerson, Longfellow, and Holmes."

"The fundamentals of poetry," as William Stanley Braithwaite aptly says, "are in the folk chants of antiquity and the communal chant of primitive peoples in the world today. . . . Poetry has advanced from the oral communal chant to a highly developed organism in which formal diction and forms of fixed patterns are more or less standardized." And it has advanced, in the English poetic history which, at least until quite recently, includes American poetic history, by a progression distinctly orderly if not always regular or measured.

From the earliest known English poems such as "Sumer is icumen in," up through the ballads, chants, and story-songs of the wandering minstrels, up through Chaucer, Hogg, Percy, the medieval, Elizabethan, Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian poets to the variously flowering and flourishing poets of the twentieth century, the stream of English-couched poetry has steadily flowed and risen. A similar course and progression



has marked the poetry tide of other lands and races. And poetry, in all known ages and stages of the world's progress, has followed, reflected, sometimes foretold and forestalled the changing course of humanity's life, experience, and thought.

When the world has been gay with romanticism, quick with chivalry, overcharged with sentiment, stirred by martial spirit, filled with religious enthusiasm, disturbed by social growing pains, poetry, faithful handmaid of life, has ever been true to the growing aims and ideals of her mistress. "For poetry," well says Louis Untermeyer, himself a rare and forceful poet, "is something more than a graceful, literary escape from life" (although, it may be interpolated, many a tired human heart and soul has found "surcease from care" in the poems of Longfellow or other gentle singers, fresh courage and stimulus and a bracing "way out" through the help of more daring bards, poetry, like religion, ministering, always, to deepest human need). "It is a spirited encounter with it."

"A spirited sharing in life's encounter"

might, perhaps, come a shade nearer the truth.

This it was that rendered the early Christian centuries so rich in religious poetry, that brought forth the tender love lyrics of the court singers, the nature worshiping of the Lake Poets, the pure philosophizing of Bryant and Whittier and Emerson; this it is that now calls to war poems and chivalric outpourings, to surging acknowledgment of divinity, the poets of the moment, that has tuned so much recent and contemporary singing to the larger themes of the human race.

"There are just two great levelers in the world—poetry and death," is the dictum of William Stanley Braithwaite, who might have added love to their number. The co-universal nature of the two—or three—accounts for the fact of poetry's early beginning and the concomitant fact that it will endure as long as time.

Poetry, moreover, began—and will persist—with form if not formality. The poets of child races lacked the finished form of their descendants, lineal and poetic, just as the

child poet of today frequently lacks the finished grace of his later production. But the poetic child, racial or individual, always expresses, consciously or otherwise, a striving toward form, especially in its simplest rhyming and rhythmic developments, a striving, be it said, frequently most powerful and moving. Pope by no means represents the sole singer who "lisp[ed] in numbers, for the numbers came."

"Milton," according to Arthur Davison Ficke, "knew what all poets will be wise to recognize today; that certain effects in poetry are wholly impossible without the use of regular rhythms and rhymes."

"The reason for this fact," Mr. Ficke explains, "is derived from the very nature of the art. It is based on the absolute necessity of carrying the lulled spirit of the reader on waves of recurrent sound into a state of suspended consciousness—a kind of visionary trance in which the mind, deaf for a moment to the distractions of the world around it, will see singly and solely the dream which the poet puts before it. The emotion-heightening,

hypnotic power of regular rhythms and recurrent rhymes is in many instances the whole basis of that peculiar somnambulistic effect which is the special magic of poetry. Emotion is the secret of it all; and some emotions answer to the call of rhyme and rhythm as to almost nothing else. Rhyme seizes the thread of one's thoughts as might a current, and intertwines with it, and draws it down into remote subterranean caverns of the spirit, unvisited by the everyday consciousness. . . .

“When the mind is a blaze of sudden revelation, and the poet's theme glows into thorough transparency of white heat, he will usually find that what he has to say flows rapidly and perfectly into the smooth mold of regular verse-forms.”

This statement, of keen interest in connection with certain fascinating poetic phenomena—Lowell's “The Vision of Sir Launfal,” it will be remembered, was composed and finished in a day—also has its value as succinctly controverting the claim so frequently and vociferously made of late to the effect that too meticulous devotion to form limits



freedom of expression, sometimes actually maims the subject matter so treated. Imperfectly mastered technique must always, of course, destroy grace if not power of expression, but the indicated claim, indirectly responsible, because of sundry ridiculous and futile free verse monstrosities produced under its spell, for much injury to its special and cherished thesis, is not substantiated by study, nor will it bear close analysis.

As well declare that because a volume of air or water is too mighty for a pint pitcher or safely to sail a tiny boat no other vessel or craft may contain or use it, as to say that because a poetic thought or mood over-runs the triolet form, is too vast and sweeping for the ballad, the chante royale, it may not gain in effect by transmission through any other form of precisely measured expression. The Psalms of David, the sweeping roll of Isaiah would lose greatly by reduction to a jogging meter, gain nothing by the most dignified and reverent of rhythmic settings, but they are not therefore formless. Free verse enthusiasts are the first to proclaim the wide difference



between vers libre and the majestic biblical blank verse.

In this connection, it will readily be accepted that for each and every extant specimen of real poetry remains but one best, inevitable mold.

Wordsworth's "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality," while in thought and trend utterly unsuited to the purely lyric form, indubitably is strengthened in force and appeal by the form with which the mind of its creator naturally endowed it. Bryant's "Thanatopsis," Meredith's "Love in the Valley," Scott's "Lady of the Lake" or "Marmion," Moore's "Lalla Rookh," Byron's "Childe Harold," Noyes' "In Old Japan," Masfield's "Dauber," how absurd to deny that these are helped rather than hampered by the forms that so well fit them. Should momentary consideration leave slightest doubt of this idea change the suggested poems into prose or recall some of the terrible distortions into which scholastic "practice work" has been known to change them. The fact that it is as dangerous to meddle with a single line of

real poetry as with the thought back of it proves much in this regard.

An instructive sidelight may be obtained, while on this subject, by perusal of such clever parodies as those in which, for example, Carolyn Wells, is wont to indulge. Spring to mind, at random, numbers of the representative and diabolically ingenious group setting forth the "purple cow" motif as various great poets might, conceivably, have framed it. The mocking, mimicking lines cling to mind and memory like limpets, but their malicious lingering is offset by their irrefutable testimony as to the practical infallibility of the original expression of any real idea.

The triolet, as has been suggested, is not as a rule suitable to solemn and deep emotions. Yet a Chicago poet, not long since, seeking poetic outlet for welling sympathy with the moner of a youthful war martyr, found herself irresistibly impelled to the triolet manner. The result was surprisingly good.

In the main, however, manner must be suited to material—which, after all, is but the main contention of both "old" and

“new” poets. One does not feel drawn to tripping steps while following a friend to the grave, nor incline to stately harmonies for the interpreting of a sentimental moment. Consider, for example, the Tennysonian favorite, “Break, Break, Break,” that has been loved and repeated almost into decay.

Here we have not only a succession of pictures—the sea, the ships, the fisherman’s boy, etc.—but we have also a tenderly vistful idea and a music of words almost as sweet as the Swinburnian phrases that might be—and frequently are—read and enjoyed for purely melodic reasons. And does not the “Break, Break, Break,” with its recurrent rhythm, harmoniously suggest the splash of waves on the shore?

Reduce this poem to free verse and an admirable argument for the classic form would be in evidence. Or subject to similar injustice the much quoted song of Pipa’s singing and note the resultant harm:

God reigns. Everything’s all right

A sterling sentiment, truly. With fair

exactitude and adequacy presenting the beauty-filled idea of Browning. But——

God's in His Heaven——

All's right with the world!

Need more be said?

New light, again, upon the vexed question of "old" and "new" poetry, of form or flexibility, is shed by the fact that great emotions do not, as reasonably might be deduced from the frequent assertion that form cramps expression, find best general outlet in uncontrolled outpouring. Of the swelling flood of real poetry called forth by the Great War, comparatively little has conformed to free verse standards. There have been many good free verse productions, just as in all possible human circumstance there will be anarchistic productions powerful enough to justify their existence, a serious hearing. Amy Lowell's "The Cornucopia of Red and Green Comfits," and Louise Driscoll's "The Metal Checks" are fine specimens of this order. But the majority of the more renowned war singers——Brooke, Seeger, Ledwidge, Gib-



son, etc.—have employed simple rhymes, standard meters for the brave and vivid heart songs that battle for the right as surely as machine guns, “tanks,” or cannon.

The urge and surge of social or socialistic sympathies, as social or socialistic antagonisms, more often than not are “put over,” “gotten across” by aid of the time-honored and time-hallowed rhythms, rhymes and pulses that have unending if not cumulative power to stir human hearts, thrill human nerves and souls and senses. Margaret Widemer’s “The Factories,” and “The Face of Teresina,” Florence Wilkinson’s “The Flower Makers,” Ruth Comfort Mitchell’s “The Night Court,” Hood’s “The Bridge of Sighs,” and “The Song of the Shirt,” these are but a few of the magnificent rhyming sermons that recur instantly, that, once read, seldom can be quite forgotten. Would Whit-tier’s slave poems, or the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” be quite so effective without their lilt, their pulsing swing?

Whitman, while scorning mere empty rhyme, was so strongly endowed with the



rhythmic gift that many of his lines affect the sensitive like the oncoming roll of thunder or the sound of the sea, of a high wind in the forest. Masfield, at times, has an ebb and flow that brings the ocean tide into the narrowest tenement. Kipling's stories in rhyme certainly lose nothing through this mode of expression. Bret Harte could be vigorous enough without sacrificing either rhyme or rhythm. Alfred Noyes, like Swinburne, is mainly music, yet, were no clear thought to be found beneath their lovely singing, who would consent to forego "Proserpine" or "The Barrel-organ" for this reason?

Yet never one of these poets, not even Whitman at his most Whitmanesque and iconoclastic, would be granted "new poetry" honors. The poems of all belong to the field of poetry which is neither old nor new because, by its very nature and essence, it is of all time.

The truth is that humanity needs rhyme, rhythm, cadence, the recurrent beauty of matching lines as it needs every other kind of beauty. It needs these, moreover, as best

and sweetest means of pressing home lessons that humanity must learn and that are most easily pointed by this method. It needs them, no less, to satisfy that hunger for artistic finish, perfection which, forsworn or fostered, lies deep in every heart.

Blank verse, stately hexameters, the chiseled sonnet, these phases of the great universal gift of poetry we may reserve for our greater moments, set aside for special occasions, but the less majestic features that the newer movement would deny us we cannot lose without starving. To sing is the first human impulse in moments of joy, grief, bereavement, triumph, or disaster; to lift up the voice in rhythmic flow is the impulse next to come.

Impressionism, cubism, futurism (each, no doubt, with its special message and lesson) may pass, but the fundamental love of form and color remains untroubled. Music without harmonic verity, tone, or even "key feeling" may come and go, but the children of men will never lose love or longing for music that conforms to sundry basic and unchang-

ing rules and regulations. So, perhaps, most markedly of all, in the realm of poetic art.

"Poetry that is real, that is fit to survive through the centuries, needs no defence," well says John Curtis Underwood. And poetry that, through tender or vigorous reality, has proved its fitness by long and strong survival stands in no fear, needs no defenders though all the hosts of hypothetically "new" poets and poetasters are arrayed against it, declare its era ended, its glory gone.

The spell and magic of rhyme, whether in the interpenetrative refrain of the folk song or ballad, the tintinnabulating reiteration and alliteration of Poe, the haunting, quivering, pulse-quickenning measures of Noyes or the plangent, recurrent burden as Vachel Lindsay in his "poem games" and folk-built poems has relearned and reemployed it, was ever, is ever, and ever will be strong to move and call us.

All the wild, strange nations of the world, from rim to rim, have had their rhyming, rhythmic songs and spells and sagas, their

runes and muntras and national songs of love, occupation, battle.

To the sway and surge of rhythmic war songs and lullabies nation after nation has marched and rocked to victory and happiness, as nation after nation will march and rock in eras too far ahead for present visioning.

Even the "music of the spheres," far from approaching or approving free verse disorder, is set to swinging, splendid rhythm and rhyme.



## THE CORNUCOPIA OF RED AND GREEN COMFITS<sup>1</sup>

Currants and Honey!

Currants and Honey!

Bar-le-Duc in times of peace.

Linden-tassel honey,

Cherry-blossom, poppy-sweet honey,

And round red currants like grape clusters,

Red and yellow globes, lustered like stretched umbrella silk,

Money chinking in town pockets,

*Louis d'or* in exchange for docketts of lading:

So many jars,

So many bushes shorn of their stars,

So many honey-combs lifted from the hive-bars.

<sup>1</sup> Miss Lowell's poem was inspired by the following press report:

"In the town of Bar-le-Duc in the Province of the Meuse in France the Prefect has issued instructions to the Mayor, the schoolmasters and the schoolmistresses to prevent the children under their care from eating candies which may be dropped from German aeroplanes, as candies which were similarly scattered in other parts of the war zone have been found to contain poison and disease germs."



Straw-pale honey and amber berries,  
Red-stained honey and currant cher-  
ries,  
Sweetness flowing out of Bar-le-Duc by  
every train,  
It rains prosperity in Bar-le-Duc in times  
of peace.  
Holy Jesus! when will there be mercy,  
when a ceasing  
Of War!  
The currant bushes are lopped and  
burned,  
The bees have flown and never returned,  
The children of Bar-le-Duc eat no more  
honey.  
And all the money in the town will not  
buy  
Enough lumps of sugar for a family.  
Father has two between sun and sun,  
So has mother, and little Jeanne, one,  
But Gaston and Marie—they have  
none.  
Two little children kneeling between the  
grape-vines,  
Praying to the starry Virgin,

They have seen her in church, shining  
out of a high window

In a currant-red gown and a crown as  
smooth as honey.

They clasp their hands and pray,  
And the sun shines brightly on them  
through the stripped Autumn vines.

Days and days pass slowly by,  
Still they measure sugar in the grocery,  
Lump and lump, and always none

For Gaston and Marie,  
And for little Jeanne, one.

But listen, Children. Over there,  
In blue, peaked Germany, the fairies  
are.

Witches who live in pine-tree glades,  
Gnomes deep in mines, with pickaxes  
and spades.

Fairies who dance upon round grass  
rings,

And a Rhine-river where a *Lorelei*  
sings.

The kind German fairies know of your  
prayer,

They caught it as it went through the  
air.

Hush, Children! Christmas is coming.  
Christmas, and fairies, and cornucopias  
of sugar-plums!

Hollow thunder over the Hartz moun-  
tains.

Hollow thunder over the Black Forest.

Hollow thunder over the Rhine.

Hollow thunder over "Unter den Lin-  
den."

Thunder kettles,

Swung above green lightning fires,

Forked and spired lightning

Cooking candy.

Bubble, froth, stew!

Stir, old women;

Stir, Generals and spur-heeled young  
officers;

Stir, misshapen Kaiser,

And shake the steam from your up-  
turned moustachios.

Streaked and polished candy you make  
here,

With hot sugar and — other things;  
Strange powders and liquids  
Dropped out of little flasks,  
Drop —  
Drop —

Into the bubbling sugar,  
And all Germany laughs.

For years the people have eaten  
the currants and honey of Bar-le-  
Duc,

Now they will give back sweetness for  
sweetness.

Ha! Ha! Ha! from Posen to Munich.

Ha! Ha! Ha! in Schleswig-Holstein.

Ha! Ha! Ha! flowing along with the  
Rhine waves.

Ha! Ha! Ha! echoing round the caves  
of Rügen.

Germany splits its sides with laughing,  
And sets out its candles for the coming  
of the Christ-child.

“Heilige Nacht!” and great white birds  
flying over Germany.

Are the storks returning in mid-Winter?



“Heilige Nacht!” the tree is lit and the  
gifts are ready.

Steady, great birds, you have flown past  
Germany,

And are hanging over Bar-le-Duc, in  
France.

The moon is bright,

The moon is clear,

Come, little Children, the fairies are  
here.

The good German fairies who heard  
your prayer,

See them floating in the star-pricked air.

The cornucopias shake on the tree,

And the star-lamps glitter brilliantly.

A shower of comfits, a shower of balls,  
Peppermint, chocolate, *marzipan* falls.

Red and white spirals glint in the moon.

Soon the fairies answered you —

Soon!

Soon!

Bright are the red and white streaked  
candies in the moonlight:

White corpse fingers pointing to the sky,  
Round blood-drops glistening like rubies.

Fairyland come true:

Just pick and pick and suck, and chew.

Sugar and sweetness at last,

Shiny stuff of joy to be had for the gathering.

The blood-drops melt on the tongue,

The corpse fingers splinter and crumble.

Weep white tears, Moon.

Soon! So soon!

Something rattles behind a hedge,

Rattles — rattles.

An old skeleton is sitting on its thigh-bones

And holding its giggling sides.

Ha! Ha! Ha!

Bar-le-Duc had currants red,

Now she has instead her dead.

Little children, sweet as honey,

Bright as currants,

Like berries snapped off and packed in coffins.

The skeleton dances,

Dances in the moonlight,  
And his fingers crack like castanets.

In blue, peaked Germany  
The cooks wear iron crosses,  
And the scullery maids trip to church  
In new ribbons sent from Potsdam.

—Amy Lowell.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE "NEW" POETRY, SO-CALLED

THE first thing to be said about the "new" poetry is that its name is a misnomer. The term *vers libre*—free verse—may be new, but the thing itself is at least as old as Milton.

In the "Samson Agonistes" choruses free verse of the freest and finest is employed to great effect—and because, as the poetic revolutionists of the present are loud in acclaiming, Milton saw and knew that not every need is filled by the regular rhythm.

Southey and Shelley both at times worked in free verse or "rhythmus," as Harold W. Gammans has called this form of poetic expression. The nineteenth century, antedating the free verse wave and notoriety, saw much good work of the kind produced.

A regular rhythm, to state the formal argument for free verse, is a sound-pattern, and conventionalized patterns never can be



fitted to every kind and type or idea or material. The strongest argument in favor of free verse lies in the fact that poetry, as an interpreter of life, must reproduce many kinds and phases of life aspects. For those emotional climaxes and crises which "strike the poet in broken flashes"—in swift, chaotic, fragmentary perceptions—free verse offers a medium undeniably fluid and fine.

It is for this very reason that free verse, "a verse-form based upon cadence," upon balanced "flow and rhythm" and more or less definite "time units" rather than upon rhyme, in all probability gradually will claim but its own place—a place assured and honored but perhaps not too large or prominent—in modern poetry. It has its own distinct and special virtues, but for the greater, more sustained events and emotions its medium will not adequately suffice.

Whitman, long before the dawn of the recent free verse enthusiasm, employed free verse rhymes and cadences with absolute sureness and spontaneity. "Leaves of Grass" he described as "an attempt to give the spirit,

the body, and the man, new words, new potentialities of speech—an American, a cosmopolitan (for the best of America is the best cosmopolitanism) range of self expression." Whitman, therefore, antedated present use of the "language of the street," with its democratic revolt against conventionality and conventional implications, in a manner that did much to set free the contemporary poet from the custom-forged fetters of the past.

"The Americans," again according to the sturdy Walt, "are going to be the most fluent and melodious-voiced people in the world—and the most fluent and the most perfect users of words. . . . The new times, the new people, the new vista"—how strange and terrible and colossal a vista, moreover, Whitman, although in a large sense prophet no less than poet, never dreamed—"need a tongue according—yes, and what is more, they will have such a tongue."

Free verse, perhaps Whitman's "new tongue," may be summed quite simply. It means, in a word, little more than a combination of revolt against the possibly over-stated

but indubitable conventionality, mock modesty and sentimental prettiness of the Victorian era, and that periodical "return to the soil" or root or fundamentals of things that mankind experiences with cyclic and inevitable regularity. Much of it is being written for the same reason that the Elizabethan dramatists wrote beautiful blank verse; because it represents the most easy and natural mode for the writers—as natural as the buoyant optimism and confidence of Vachel Lindsay, the grim pessimism of Masters or the tragic tenderness of Olive Tilford Dargan. Much more is being written because the writers, feeling a strong poetic impulse, fail to carry it to legitimate or logical conclusion, to complete the inner processes of composition, or to take the pains necessary for poetic perfection. Much, much more is being written, has been written, from a desire to be in the poetic fashion, to attract attention, to achieve notoriety by becoming bold, brazen, or bizarre.

The "new" poets themselves are greatly at variance in regard to the purpose and vir-

tues, or even quality and character, of free verse. William Dean Howells, later the author of successful free verse narratives, once described free verse, rather contemptuously, as "shredded prose." John Burroughs, vitally interested in all serious poetic developments, has gone on record as finding that many of the free verse writers seem to have no real message.

"They strive so awfully after form," he told a recent seeker after information. "If they had anything real to say, the form would come of itself and there would be no need of all this contortion and acrobation. Now, there was an osseous frame to Whitman's poetry. He had something so vital to say that his message almost said itself"—in the manner, be it noted, that Mr. Ficke attributes to poetic messages of far different order. "Yet I remember what a great reviser of his own work he was. Loose as his verse form may seem to some, he was as careful with every syllable of it as though he were forging a delicate chain of gold."

On the other hand, Ezra Pound, one of



the earliest and most persistent of poetic insurgents, before the insurgent era of his poetic development known as a writer of delicate conventional poems and translations, not only believes that the poet having "something real to say" can say it most effectively in the free verse manner, but can advance telling arguments to support even the striving "so awfully after form."

"Can you teach the American poet," he asked Harriet Monroe, successful poet of more than one order and editor of *Poetry*, when this now famous Chicago "Magazine of Verse" was still in its tentative stage—"can you teach the American poet that poetry is an art, an art with a technique, with media, an art that must be in constant flux—a constant change of manner—if it is to live? Can you teach him that it is not a pentametric echo of the sociological dogma printed in last year's magazines?"

The art of much of Mr. Pound's poetry surely is the art that conceals art, while his technique is quite too uncertain—or involved—for popular conception. But Mr. Pound

and his followers, in getting away from certain belittling limitations of the majority of their predecessors, in all reasonable probability have rendered the poetic art good service. Its career as a spectacular sensation ended—Pound, we remember, has admitted certain of his earlier free verse work merely “a seven days’ wonder in Chicago”—the right of untrammelled poetic freedom established, free verse may well settle down as a regular and recognized branch of poetic expression.

Josephine Preston Peabody, exquisite poet of the “old” order, feels that there is not so much a “new movement” in poetry as “an eddy, related to movement, or progress, as a side-eddy is related to the main current of a river.”

The “working faith” of this veritable “sweet singer” stands thus self characterized: “To the worker, his choice of tools. To the reader, his own delights.”

Sara Teasdale, another exquisite worker with the standard poetic medium, voices a similar catholicity of feeling.

“There is no surer sign of a vigorous art

than violent differences of opinion among the people who practice it. So far as the respective merits of free verse and melodic rhymed verse go, it seems to me that the question is wholly one of the individuality of the poet and of the nature of his subject. It is a question of fitness. The idea of such a poem as Burns' 'Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doon' in free verse is painful. On the other hand, the war poem by Amy Lowell called 'The Cornucopia of Red and Green Comfits' [the poem immediately preceding this chapter] is so perfectly wedded to its form—a vivid, rapid, free verse with unexpected and most telling rhymes—that one could not conceive how it could have been so powerful in any other form."

Again, Edwin Arlington Robinson, included by Amy Lowell among the six notable American poets, all of later manner, studied in her illuminating "Tendencies in Modern American Poetry," yet who as frequently indulges in beautiful rhyming as in free verse rhythms, entertains similar ideas.

"You ask me," so the dictum included by

Lloyd R. Morris in the interesting "anthology of opinion on the aims and tendencies of the American literature of today and tomorrow" called "The Young Idea" and mainly devoted to poetic matters, "if I think there is a new movement in poetry, and my reply is that there is always a new movement in poetry. There is always a new movement in everything, including each new inch of each new revolution of the earth around the sun. But if you mean to ask me if this new movement implies necessarily any radical change in the structure or in the general nature of what the world has agreed to call poetry, I shall have to tell you that I do not think so.

. . . . In referring to a new movement I assume that you refer primarily to vers libre—a form, or lack of form, that may or may not produce pleasant results."

Miss Lowell herself, American high priestess of the "new movement," says:

"When people speak of the 'New Poetry,' they generally mean that poetry which is written in the newer, freer form. But such a distinction is misleading in the extreme, for,



after all, forms are merely forms, of no particular value unless they are the necessary and adequate clothing to some particular manner of thought."

The "New Poetry" to Miss Lowell, then, means, mainly, a new manner of poetic thinking, incidentally a new manner of expressing that thinking in lines and words.

Some such basic understanding or conception is highly necessary, surely, when considering such widely differing exponents of the "new" poetic school as Robert Frost, and Masters, as Ezra Pound and Eunice Tietjens, or Carl Sandburg and "H. D."

Says Miss Lowell further:

"The modern poets are less concerned with dogma and more with truth. They see in the universe a huge symbol, and so absolute has this symbol become to them that they have no need to dwell constantly upon its symbolic meaning. For this reason, the symbol has taken on a new intensity, and is given much prominence. What appear to be pure nature poems are of course so, but in a different way from most nature poems of the older

writers; for nature is not now something separate from man, man and nature are recognized as part of a whole, man being a part of nature, and all falling into a place in a vast plan, the key to which is natural science.

"In some modern American poets this attitude is more conscious than in others, but all have been affected by it; it has modified poetry, as it is more slowly modifying the whole of our social fabric.

"What sets the poets of today apart from those of the Victorian era is an entire difference of outlook. Ideas believed to be fundamental have disappeared and given place to others. And as poetry is the expression of the heart of man, so it reflects this change to the smallest particle."

All of which, of course, is but another manner of saying that modern poetry, the poetry of all nations, but especially, perhaps, of America, is merely undergoing changes noticeable in all other forms of human existence and development. But it should be noted, in this connection, that not all modern poets feel the need of the highly symbolic medium

—so symbolic, in some cases, as to become decidedly obscure. Consider, for illustration, that doubly characteristic excerpt from the “Lustra” of Ezra Pound, “Women Before a Shop:”

The gew-gaws of false amber and false  
turquoise attract them.

“Like to like nature:” those agglutinous  
yellows!

Which delightful fragment, like many of its distinctly imagistic fellows, indubitably means more to the writer than to the general reader. The question is whether or not it is wise or artistic to invade poetic areas with material so bound, in Mr. Pound’s own words concerning certain of his own poems, to become “a very depleted fashion, . . . . A homely, transient antiquity.” Such poetry, if, for the moment and for the sake of argument, we concede the title, is not of the sort that lives.

Or analyze, for second specimen, Walter Conrad Arensberg’s “Ing.”

Ing? Is it possible to mean ing?

Suppose

for the termination in *g*  
a disoriented  
series

of the simple fractures  
in sleep.

Soporific  
has accordingly a value for soap  
so present to  
sew pieces.

And *p* says: Peace is.

And suppose the *i*

to be big in ing  
as Beginning.

Then Ing is to ing

as aloud

accompanied by times  
and the meaning is a possibility  
of ralsis.

Decidedly, distinctly, "revolutionary," not to say interesting, that strange — collection of words. But is it poetry? Defer decisive judgment by terse recapitulation of the "new" poetry's principal tenets and aims as expressed in the "Imagistic Creed" self acclaimed by the comparatively small group of writers who, because of the marked peculiarities of their chosen modes, have been credited with more than their fair share of "new poetry" glory and fame.

1. To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word, not the



near-exact, nor the merely decorative word.

2. To create new rhythms — as the expression of new moods — and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods. We do not insist upon “free verse” as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as a principle of liberty. We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free verse than in conventional form. In poetry a new cadence means a new idea.

3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject. It is not good art to write badly of aeroplanes and automobiles, nor is it necessarily bad art to write well about the past. We believe passionately in the artistic values of modern life, but we wish to point out that there is nothing so uninspiring nor so old-fashioned as an aeroplane of the year 1911.

4. To present an image (hence the name: “Imagist”). We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. It is for this reason that we oppose the cosmic

poet, who seems to us to shirk the real difficulties of his art.

5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.

6. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is of the very essence of poetry.

The brief creed so expressed—not pledged—by the primary Imagists was preceded by this significant declaration:

"These principles are not new; they have fallen into desuetude. They are the essentials of all great poetry, indeed of all great literature."

Miss Lowell amplifies:

"It is not primarily on account of their forms, as is commonly supposed, that the Imagist poets represent a changed point of view; it is because of their reactions toward the world in which they live."

The "new" poetry, however, setting aside the work of the Imagists, who, by their declaration of poetic independence and practical outworking of its tenets, would seem at once to have "done their bit" and served their turn,

and such ephemeral ultra-novelty-mongers as the Vorticists, Spectricists, etc.—mainly, as previously suggested, is concerned with new ideas quite as much as with new modes of expression—which makes the task of distinguishing between followers of the “old” and “new” schools occasionally rather difficult.

Miss Lowell, who must be admitted an authority in such connection, includes in her recent study only six poets, namely, Edward Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost, Edgar Lee Masters, Carl Sandburg, “H. D.” or Mrs. Richard Aldington (Hilda Doolittle), and John Gould Fletcher—paying but passing tribute to Vachel Lindsay, William Rose Benet, Louis Untermeyer, James Oppenheim, Eunice Tietjens, Ezra Pound, and others of generally accredited “new poetry” ilk.

For general purposes, because the six poets named typify all the combined and distinguishing characteristics of the newer poetic era, her grouping may be maintained.

Mr. Robinson and Mr. Frost, in Miss Lowell’s opinion, “represent various things in the ‘new movement’—realism, direct

speech, simplicity, and the like." The work of Mr. Masters and Mr. Sandburg she regards as "being the most revolutionary that America has yet produced." Fletcher and "H. D.," of course, are Imagists pure and simple. The English Imagists Miss Lowell defines as Richard Aldington, F. S. Flint, and D. H. Lawrence. ("H. D." though resident in London, is of American rearing and birth.)

Since illustration is of all educational methods most useful, these and other representative "new" poets herewith shall be allowed to speak for themselves.

Of all the "new" poetry no single example, perhaps, has been so much, so variously quoted as the "Oread" of "H. D.," largely because its six lines comprise such perfect specimen of the "cadenced verse" which is really free verse in that it utterly relinquishes all thought of regulation meters and rhymes.

Whirl up, sea —

Whirl your pointed pines.

Splash your great pines



On our rocks.

Hurl your green over us—

Cover us with your pools of fir.

“It will be quickly seen,” says Miss Lowell, discussing “Oread,” “that this poem is made up of five cadences, ‘Whirl up, sea —’ is one cadence; ‘Whirl your pointed pines,’ is another; ‘Splash your great pines on our rocks,’ is a third; ‘Hurl your green over us,’ a fourth; and the fifth, ‘Cover us with your pools of fir’.”

Mr. and Mrs. Aldington, it is explained, never “permit themselves occasional lines which might be timed by the old scansion,” not even should these occur most naturally. They are faithful to the newer “time units which are in no sense syllabic,” depending upon the manner of reading—the hurrying or delaying of such words as seem necessary—to “fill out the swing of the lines.”

“Sea Gods” is one of the flower poems for which “H. D.” is famous, and it also is one of her most characteristic. Part of this poem follows:

But we bring violets,  
Great masses — single, sweet,  
Wood-violets, stream-violets,  
Violets from a wet marsh.

Violets in clumps from hills,  
Tufts with earth at the roots,  
Violets tugged from rocks,  
Blue-violets, moss, cliff, river-violets.

Yellow violets' gold,  
Burnt with a rare tint —  
Violets like red ash  
Among tufts of grass.

We bring deep-purple  
Bird-foot violets.

We bring the hyacinth-violets,  
Sweet, bare, chill to the touch —  
And violets whiter than the in-rush  
Of your own white surf.

Contrast this lovely offering of the violets  
to the sea gods, its daringly beautiful reitera-

tion of the violet theme, with one of the equally famous rain poems of John Gould Fletcher, the other American Imagist best known for this kind of work.

Over the roof-tops race the shadows of  
clouds:

Like horses the shadows of clouds charge  
down the street.

Whirlpools of purple and gold,  
Winds from the mountains of cinna-  
bar,

Lacquered mandarin moments, palan-  
quins swaying and balancing

Amid the vermilion pavilions, against  
the jade balustrades;

Glint of the glittering wings of dragon-  
flies in the light;

Silver filaments, golden flakes settling  
downwards,

Rippling, quivering flutters, repulse and  
surrender,

The sun broidered upon the rain,

The rain rustling with the sun.

Over the roof-tops race the shadows of  
clouds:

Like horses the shadows of clouds charge  
down the street.

To catch a glimpse of the scope and versatility of this poet, who believes that "poetry is capable of as many gradations in cadence as music is in time," follow perusal of the just given poem, with its strong, sweeping, rushing movement, by perusal of the following, also representing—rather than describing—rain:

The spattering of the rain upon pale terraces

Of afternoon is like the passing of a dream

Amid the roses shuddering 'gainst the wet green stalks

Of the streaming trees—the passing of the wind

Upon the pale lower terraces of my dream

Is like the crinkling of the wet gray robes



Of the hours that come to turn over the  
urn

Of the day and spill its rainy dream.

Vague movement over the puddled ter-  
races:

Heavy gold pennons—a pomp of sol-  
emn gardens

Half hidden under the liquid veil of  
spring:

Far trumpets like a vague rout of faded  
roses

Burst 'gainst the wet green silence of dis-  
tant forests:

A clash of cymbals—then the swift  
swaying footsteps

Of the wind that undulates along the  
languid terraces.

Pools of rain—the vacant terraces

Wet, chill, and glistening

Towards the sunset beyond the broken  
doors of today.

It might almost be said that the whole theory and philosophy of free verse, \ from origin to popular justification, lies in the pic-

ture-making suggestions, the slow, languorous rhythm of those lines.

Edgar Lee Masters, with his wonderful psychology and power of character portraiture, his hard, ironic humor, and his encroaching obsession of sex, may be placed at the gamut end farthest opposed to the position occupied by Fletcher and "H. D." To many his remarkable "Spoon River Anthology" belongs rather in the realm of psychology than of poetry, but the poetic beauty of countless included cadences, as the incisive appeal of the haunting, embodying epitaphs, is undeniable. The tragedy that Mr. Masters loves best—in the "Anthology," indeed, is little but tragedy, mental, physical, moral, spiritual, and that of the grimmest—is well expressed in "Elsa Wertman," piteous as strong.

I was a peasant girl from Germany,  
Blue-eyed, rosy, happy, and strong.  
And the first place I worked was at  
Thomas Greene's.

On a summer's day when she was away

He stole into the kitchen and took me  
Right in his arms and kissed me on my  
throat,

I turning my head. Then neither of us  
Seemed to know what happened.

And I cried for what would become of  
me.

And cried and cried as my secret began  
to show.

One day Mrs. Greene said she understood,

And would make no trouble for me,  
And, being childless, would adopt it.

(He had given her a farm to be still.)

So she hid in the house and sent out  
rumors,

As if it were going to happen to her.

And all went well and the child was  
born — They were so kind to me.

Later I married Gus Wertman, and  
years passed.

But — at political rallies when sitters-by  
thought I was crying

At the eloquence of Hamilton Greene —  
That was not it.

No! I wanted to say:  
That's my son! That's my son!

"Hamilton Greene," a subsequent epitaph, gives another phrase of the indicated story and rounds out the typical Masters manner and idea.

I was the only child of Frances Harris  
of Virginia

And Thomas Greene of Kentucky,  
Of valiant and honorable blood both.  
To them I owe all that I became,  
Judge, member of Congress, leader in  
the State.

From my mother I inherited  
Vivacity, fancy, language;  
From my father will, judgment, logic.  
All honor to them  
For what service I was to the people!

The peculiar form in which the "Anthology" poems—supposedly written or spoken by the dead folk in the cemetery—are cast



provides opportunity for curious effects, curiously quaint and impressive, but Mr. Masters' half realistic, half romantic method has been effectively employed in other ways.

Carl Sandburg, quite differently grim and stern, yet with an underlying vein of tenderness clearly to be discerned by the sympathetic, shall not here be represented by "Chicago," which first brought him national if not international reputation, but by excerpts from "The Four Brothers," (forming part of the later "Notes for War Songs") and from the earlier group of poems generically entitled "Days."

Look! It is four brothers in joined  
hands together,  
The people of bleeding France,  
The people of bleeding Russia,  
The people of Britain, the people of  
America —

These are the four brothers, these are  
the four republics.

At first I said it in anger as one who  
clenches his fist in

wrath to fling his knuckles in the face  
of someone taunting;

Now I say it calmly as one who has  
thought it over and over again at  
night, among the mountains, by the  
sea-combers in storm.

I say now, by God, only fighters today  
will save the world, nothing but fight-  
ers will keep alive the names of those  
who left red prints of bleeding feet at  
Valley Forge in Christmas snow.

On the cross of Jesus, the sword of  
Napoleon, the skull of Shakespeare,  
the pen of Tom Jefferson, the ashes of  
Abraham Lincoln, or any sign of the  
red and running life poured out by  
the mothers of the world,

By the God of morning glories climb-  
ing blue the doors of quiet homes, by  
the God of tall hollyhocks laughing  
glad to children in peaceful valleys,  
by the God of new mothers wishing  
peace to sit at windows nursing babies,

I swear only reckless men, ready to  
throw away their lives by hunger,

deprivation, desperate clinging to a  
single purpose imperturbable and un-  
daunted, men with the primitive guts  
of rebellion,

Only fighters gaunt with the red brand  
of labor's sorrow on their brows and  
labor's terrible pride in their blood,  
men with souls asking danger — only  
these will save and keep the four big  
brothers.

Goodnight is the word, goodnight to the  
kings, the czars,

Goodnight to the kaiser.

The breakdown and the fade-away be-  
gins.

The shadow of a great broom, ready to  
sweep out the truth, is here.

One finger is raised that counts the  
czar,

The ghost who beckoned men who come  
no more —

The czar has gone to the winds on God's  
great dustpan,

The czar a pinch of nothing,

The last of the gibbering Romanoffs.

Out and goodnight—

The ghosts of the summer palaces

And the ghosts of the winter palaces!

Out and out, goodnight to the kings, the  
czars, the kaisers.

Another singer will speak,

And the kaiser, the ghost who gestures  
a hundred million sleeping-waking  
ghosts,

The kaiser will go onto God's great  
dustpan—

The last of the gibbering Hohenzol-  
lerns.

Look! God pities this trash, God waits  
with a broom and a dustpan,

God knows a finger will speak and count  
them out.

"Under the Harvest Moon," one of the  
"Days" group, shows Mr. Sandburg in dif-  
ferent but equally characteristic mood.

Under the harvest moon,  
When the soft silver



Drips shimmering  
Over the garden nights,  
Death, the gray mocker,  
Comes and whispers to you  
As a beautiful friend  
Who remembers.

Under the summer roses  
When the fragrant crimson  
Lurks in the dusk  
Of the wild red leaves,  
Love, with little hands,  
Comes and touches you  
With a thousand memories,  
And asks you  
Beautiful, unanswerable questions.

Mr. Sandburg, it will be seen, is a poet of large thoughts, large impulses, large ideas, and large rhythms. Easy to understand why not for him, virile to the point of brutality, strong to the recurrent edge of crudeness, rhyming, lilting line limits, or even the measured bounds and restrictions of majestic blank verse.

Remain, of Miss Lowell's grouping, only Robert Frost and Edwin Arlington Robinson to be considered. Robinson, musical, polished, brilliant, many-toned poet, shall be more adequately considered later, his well-earned poetic honors being by no means of exclusively "new" order. But it may be said, in passing, that Robinson is one of the most intellectual contemporary English-writing poets, just as Frost is one of the most intuitive. The work of these two men, indeed, has much in common, though that of Robinson is more warmly colored. Mr. Frost is a poetic intellectual too, but to him much that Mr. Robinson carefully, consciously records has become second nature. Mr. Frost, again, is more distinctly marked by the "New England influence," in that, while he happened to be born in San Francisco, much of his life has been passed in Massachusetts, where he still resides.

Miss Lowell says that Frost is "as New England as Burns is Scotch, Synge Irish, or Mistral Provencal." Robinson in spirit, if not in expression, suggests a wider range.

Frost, whose poems first knew English publication, in "North of Boston," according to its author a sadly piquant "book of people," tells moving stories, generally unrhymed, about men, women, and happenings inseparable from the stern soil whence they sprang. These poems, which mark and typify a poetic tendency distinctly new at the time of their first appearance, and still distinctly impressive, are too long for present repetition. The Frost nature poems and pastorals, delicately austere but delicately depictive and fine as an exquisite etching, are subject to no such restriction. They exemplify, moreover, the gift for lovely rhyming with which this poet is highly endowed and which he still does not disdain to use upon occasion. Take, for example, the graceful thought, less firm, clean cut, and vigorous than many to come later, but of indubitable poetic virtue, that makes so real a fine October morning.

Retard the sun with gentle mist;  
Enchant the land with amethyst.  
Slow, slow!

For the grapes' sake, if they were all,  
Whose leaves already are burnt with frost,  
Whose clustered fruit must else be lost —  
For the grapes' sake along the wall.

This fragment suggests anew that the line of demarcation between "old" and "new" poetry frequently lies rather in attitude than outworking, save, of course, where the most amazingly individual specimens are considered. Any real poet, of any age, of any order, might, in so far as verbalism is concerned, have written that stanza, though not every real poet might have put into it just the distinguishing tone and spirit. A fair quotation from the later "Birches" may suggest more distinctive Frost material and mode.

When I see the birches bend to left and  
right  
Across the lines of straighter, darker  
trees,  
I like to think some boy's been swinging  
them.  
But swinging doesn't bend them down  
to stay.



Ice-storms do that. Often you must  
have seen them

Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning  
After a rain. They click upon themselves  
As the breeze rises, and turn many-  
colored

As the stir cracks and crazes their  
enamel.

Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed  
crystal shells

Shattering and avalanching on the snow-  
crust —

Such heaps of broken glass to sweep  
away

You'd think the inner dome of heaven  
had fallen. . . . .

. . . . .

I'd like to get away from earth awhile  
And then come back to it and begin over.  
May no fate wilfully misunderstand me  
And half grant what I wish and snatch  
me away

Not to return. Earth's the right place  
for love:

I don't know where it's likely to go  
better.

I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,  
And climb black branches up a snow-  
white trunk

*Toward* heaven, till the tree could bear  
no more,

But dipped its top and set me down  
again.

That would be good both going and  
coming back.

One could do worse than be a swinger  
of birches.

Mainly, it may be said, Frost is a poet of tragedy, the hushed and hidden tragedy of soul rather than body. But in his passion for humanity, his love of nature, his sense of human and earth values, he proves himself a poet of all emotions, as, perhaps, of all time.

The contention that, as Miss Lowell maintains, the "so-called 'new movement' in American poetry is evidence of the rise of a native school" receives substantial support

from the fact that so many American poets now employ the newer medium that search for characteristic examples suffers from embarrassment of riches. But from the wide and full field offered, certain phases and productions of two other unusual poets, Vachel Lindsay and Eunice Tietjens, shall be briefly surveyed.

Lindsay, true poet of his time, yet with traditional traits inherited from the poets of the ages, not only fulfils Macaulay's definition of poetry as "the art of employing words in such a manner as to produce an illusion on the imagination, the art of doing by means of words what the painter does by means of colors," but he apparently believes, with Bailey, that

Poetry is itself a thing of God's;  
He made His prophets poets.

For Lindsay has as clear a gift for the kind of prophecy based on sympathetic comprehension and interpretation as for brave and lyric singing. The Lindsay productions, be they "poem games" like "The Potatoes,"

"King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba," or such masterly efforts as "The Congo" and "General Booth Enters Heaven," are not only rhythmic and rhymeful but strongly indicative and trenchant. Lindsay is a true modern in regard to freshness of subject and treatment, a true poet in his unfailing ability to "produce an illusion on the imagination," to read and reproduce the hearts and emotions of his fellows.

"The Congo," "This, my song is made for Kerensky," here are great poems, of the kind that makes for the rebuilding of humanity. "The Chinese Nightingale" is real poetry of another order, that which "produces the illusion" of vivid color and movement and strongly stimulates the fancy. "The Congo," with its stirring, voodoo-like refrain, "Then I saw the Congo creeping through the black," should not be wronged by piecemeal quotation, but a vision or so from the breast of Chang, the San Francisco laundryman in "The Chinese Nightingale," dreaming of bygone glories to the music of the "gray small bird" who



Sang as though for the soul of him  
Who ironed away in that bower dim

may without injustice be shared.

“Where is the princess, loved forever,  
Who made Chang first of the kings of  
men?”

And the joss in the corner stirred again;  
And the carved dog, curled in his arms,  
awoke,

Barked forth a smoke-cloud that whirled  
and broke.

It piled in a maze round the ironing-  
place,

And there on the snowy table wide  
Stood a Chinese lady of high degree,  
With a scornful, witching, tea-rose  
face . . . .

Yet she put away all form and pride,  
And laid her glimmering veil aside  
With a childlike smile for Chang and  
for me.

. . . . .

Then this did the noble lady say:

"Bird, do you dream of our home-  
coming day

When you flew like a courier on before  
From the dragon-peak to our palace-  
door,

And we drove the steed in your singing  
path—

The ramping Dragon of laughter and  
wrath;

And found our city all aglow,

And knighted this joss that decked it so?

There were golden fishes in the purple  
river

And silver fishes and rainbow fishes.

There were golden junks in the laughing  
river,

And silver junks and rainbow junks:

There were golden lilies by the bay and  
river,

And silver lilies and tiger-lilies,

And tinkling wind-bells in the gardens of  
the town

By the black-lacquer gate

Where walked in state

The kind king Chang  
And his sweet-heart mate . . . .  
With his flag-born dragon  
And his crown of pearl . . . .  
and . . . . jade;  
And his nightingale reigning in the mul-  
berry shade,  
And sailors and soldiers on the sea-  
sands brown,  
And priests who bowed them down to  
your song—  
By the city called Han, the peacock  
town,  
By the city called Han, the nightingale  
town,  
The nightingale town.”

. . . . .  
“I have forgotten  
Your dragons great,  
Merry and mad and friendly and bold.  
Dim is your proud lost palace-gate.  
I vaguely know  
There were heroes of old,  
Troubles more than the heart could  
hold,

They said to one another,



They spoke, I think, of perils past,  
They spoke, I think, of peace at last.  
One thing I remember:  
"Spring came on forever,  
Spring came on forever,"  
Said the Chinese nightingale.

Quite another interpretation and aspect of China, as of "new" poetry, is suggested by Eunice Tietjens in "The Shop," taken from the slight yet rich collection of poetic "Profiles from China," on which the present poetic fame of the writer principally is based. The articles sold in the shop specified "are to be burned at funerals for the use of the dead in the spirit world," and Mrs. Tietjens, rendering them real as the weather, proves the creative, memory-searing genius hers in no slight degree.

The master of the shop is a pious man,  
in good odor with the priests.  
He is old and honorable, and his white  
moustache droops below his chin.  
Mencius, I think, looked so.

The shop behind him is a mimic world,  
a world of pieties and shams—the  
valley of remembrance—the dwell-  
ing place of the unquiet dead.

Here on his shelves are ranged the  
splendor and the panoply of life, silk  
in smooth gleaming rolls, silver in in-  
gots, carving and embroidery and  
jade, a scarlet bearer-chair, a pipe for  
opium. . . .

Whatever life has need of, it is here,  
And it is for the dead.

Whatever life has need of, it is here.  
Yet it is here in sham, in effigy, in tor-  
tured compromise.

The dead have need of silk. Yet silk is  
dear, and there are living backs to  
clothe.

The rolls are paper. . . . Do not  
look too close.

The dead, I think, will understand.

The carvings, too, the bearer-chair, the  
jade—yes, they are paper; and the  
shining ingots, they are tinsel.

Yet they are made with skill and loving  
care!

And if the priest knows — surely he must  
know! — when they are burned they'll  
serve the dead as well as verities.

So living mouths can feed.

The master of the shop is a pious man.  
He has attained much honor and his  
white moustache droops below his  
chin.

“Such an one,” he says, “I burned for  
my own father. And such an one my  
son will burn for me.

For I am old, and half my life already  
dwells among the dead.”

And, as he speaks, behind him in the  
shop I feel the presence of a hovering  
host, the myriads of the immortal  
dead, the rulers of the spirit in this  
land. . . . .

For in this kingdom of the dead they  
who are living cling with fevered  
hands to the torn fringes of the

mighty past. And if they fail a  
little, compromise. . . .

The dead, I think, will understand.

Here, it will be seen, is an interesting and ultra-individual variation of the newer poetry manner, "at once realistic and romantic," a variation of "polyphonic prose" alike novel, dignified, and comprising at once the best and most specialized characteristics of that manner. Mrs. Tietjens is another of the poetic artists who employ words much as their fellows of the brush employ paint.

"New" poets of varied but worth while tenor might be cited almost without number. Few writers of any power, it would seem, but have written at least one or two free verse poems, finding therein, it may be, new channel for the outpouring of poetic fervor not readily to be restrained or restricted, new outlet for the unnamed urge and surge that, yeast-wise, affects contemporary humanity. Many of these poems deserve to live, and will live, long after the "new poetry" excite-



ment has attained just level, lost the meretricious notoriety of faddism, and become a recognized and accepted member of poetic society. Many of the writers in all probability gradually will assume less prominent but more assured poetic position as their poetic uncertainties are left behind by the calm maturing of the new poetic thought.

The work of Miss Lowell, in this cinematic glimpse to be fairly if not adequately represented by "The Cornucopia of Red and Green Comfits," partakes of this nature. Never a victim of the wildest poetic insurgency, the Lowell poetry already has attained increasing strength, dignity, and sweetness, year by year is becoming less bizarre, more chastened, of richer, more spiritual flavor. Another decade, two at most, and its arresting "newness" almost inevitably will have been forgotten, while its sterling value to the cause of poetic freedom and flexibility must remain.

So, too, albeit differently, with the work of that faithful and devoted acolyte at the altar of poetic beauty, Harriet Monroe.

Miss Monroe, because of the cordial hospitality of her "Magazine of Verse," "*Poetry*," to the "new" poets, in popular regard quite naturally is ranged with the "new" poets. But Miss Monroe, whose magazine also has been generously hospitable to poetry of more standard order, herself is limited to no particular school or movement. She has produced good poems of free, elastic nature, but many of her best and best known numbers belong in more formal category. The "Columbian Ode" written for the Columbian Exposition not only antedated the "new movement" by some years but stands far removed from anything like "new poetry" ideals and manner. One of the most widely loved Monroe poems, the "Love Song" that so well withstands careful criticism and analysis, is of almost geometric perfection and finish. This poem, as proving the point that few real artists are restricted to any one mood or manner, shall be here enjoyed.

I love my life, but not too well  
To give it to thee like a flower,

So it may pleasure thee to dwell  
    Deep in its perfume but an hour.  
I love my life, but not too well.

I love my life, but not too well  
    To sing it note by note away,  
So to thy soul the song may tell  
    The beauty of the desolate day.  
I love my life, but not too well.

I love my life, but not too well  
    To cast it like a cloak on thine,  
Against the storms that sound and swell  
    Between thy lonely heart and mine.  
I love my life, but not too well.

New and enchanting and infinitely varied poetic voices, to carry the thought a little further, continually arise and will arise among the English-speaking people. The tale of today must be sadly incomplete tomorrow, as that of yesterday lacks much at the present moment. For this reason alone, if for no other, anything approaching a full catalogue of study of contemporary poets, "new"

or classic would be as absurd as impossible. But here is no distant attempt at such study—merely a signpost modestly showing a way to the poetic kingdom of wondrous glory and “many mansions,” suggesting as simplest substitutes for the long-lost magic carpet, certain well-known and well-mannered guides.



My dear Mr. [Name]

I have received your letter of the 10th inst. and am  
glad to hear that you are well. I am  
also well and hope this finds you the same.  
I have not much news to write at present.  
I am, however, very anxious to hear from you  
again.

I am, dear Mr. [Name], very respectfully,  
Your obedient servant,  
[Signature]

I have not much news to write at present.  
I am, however, very anxious to hear from you  
again. I am, dear Mr. [Name], very respectfully,  
Your obedient servant,  
[Signature]

I have not much news to write at present.  
I am, however, very anxious to hear from you  
again. I am, dear Mr. [Name], very respectfully,  
Your obedient servant,  
[Signature]

I have not much news to write at present.  
I am, however, very anxious to hear from you  
again. I am, dear Mr. [Name], very respectfully,  
Your obedient servant,  
[Signature]

I have not much news to write at present.  
I am, however, very anxious to hear from you  
again. I am, dear Mr. [Name], very respectfully,  
Your obedient servant,  
[Signature]

## THE SOLDIER

If I should die, think only this of me:  
That there's some corner of a foreign  
field  
That is forever England. There shall be  
In that rich earth a richer dust con-  
cealed;  
A dust whom England bore, shaped,  
made aware,  
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her  
ways to roam,  
A body of England's, breathing English  
air,  
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns  
of home.  
And think, this heart, all evil shed  
away,  
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less  
Gives somewhere back the thoughts  
by England given;  
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy  
as her day;

And laughter, learnt of friends; and  
gentleness,  
In hearts at peace, under an English  
heaven.

—RUPERT BROOKE.

## CHAPTER V

### FORMAL POETRY: THE SONNET, THE ODE, THE ELEGY, AND BLANK VERSE

THE appeal of strictly formal poetry popularly is supposed to be extremely limited. A tradition obtains to the effect that formal poetry—blank verse, the sonnet, odes, epics, elegies, religious poems—are read only by the poetically elect, the academic, the student, the “highbrow.” As a matter of fact, the exact reverse frequently is true.

The Bible, containing some of the finest blank verse and unrhymed poetry in existence, through long ages has been the solace of many unlettered readers who frankly have loved it as much for its manner as substance. The twenty-third Psalm, the one hundred and third Psalm, the “charity chapter” of Corinthians—aye, even in the weakened version of certain modernized renderings—the “Song of Solomon,” various portions of Job and Isaiah, these are among the numerous bib-



lical extracts that, comprising poetry intrinsically good and moving, always have been dear to the common heart. Let us quote, for supporting illustration, the passage from the "Song" exquisite as universally beloved.

Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;

The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;

The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

Think, again, of that equally cherished and uplifting passage from Ecclesiastes:

In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grind-

ers cease because they are few, and  
those that look out of the windows  
be darkened,

And the doors shall be shut in the streets,  
when the sound of the grinding is  
low, and he shall rise up at the voice  
of the bird, and all the daughters of  
musick shall be brought low;

Also when they shall be afraid of that  
which is high, and fears shall be in  
the way, and the almond tree shall  
flourish, and the grasshopper shall be  
a burden, and desire shall fail: be-  
cause man goeth to his long home, and  
the mourners go about the streets:

Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the  
golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher  
be broken at the fountain, or the  
wheel broken at the cistern.

Then shall the dust return to the earth  
as it was: and the spirit shall return  
unto God who gave it.

What could keep such poetry from the love  
of all those, learned or unlearned, who are

awake to the beauty of high thought, of perfect imagery, of the prevailing needs and impulses of human nature? Call it poetry, call it scripture, call it what you will or nothing at all, it still will be held dear for its calm and classic beauty, for the perfect thing it is.

And that other splendid and almost equally appreciated biblical poem, the prayer which King Solomon made when he "kneeled down upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven." But a few verses must here represent that which deserves to be included in poetic anthologies of many kinds.

If thy people go out to war against their  
enemies by the way that thou shalt  
send them, and they pray unto thee  
toward this city which thou hast  
chosen, and the house which I have  
built for thy name;

Then hear thou from the heavens their  
prayer and their supplication, and  
maintain their cause.

If they sin against thee, (for there is no

man which sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them over before their enemies, and they carry them away captives unto a land far off or near;

Yet if they . . . return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, whither they have carried them captives, and pray toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, and toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for thy name:

Then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling place, their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee.

In passages such as this may be found at once the reason and the justification of formal poetry. It is the poetry of high moods, of exalted thoughts and emotion. The verses quoted, always majestic and impelling, would



be out of place in a gay gathering, out of harmony upon such occasions as well might be graced by the joyous lyric from the "Song of Solomon." So, in like manner, might any light or lively specimen of poetry, of whatever variety, lack appeal in life's solemn moments without in slightest degree losing specific appeal or virtue. The strongest lover of poetry, as of music or art or humanity or nature, wants not always the lighter, more gladsome moods and aspects of his charmer. Many a rare spirit, many a temperament largely compound of tenderness and gaiety, at times might turn readily from the lilting melody of "Pippa Passes" to the stately measure, the spiritual grandeur of Bryant's "Forest Hymn" or "Thanatopsis." Note the simple majesty, the impressive application of these lines from the latter.

To him who in the love of Nature holds  
Communion with her visible forms, she  
speaks

A various language; for his gayer hours

She has a voice of gladness, and a smile  
And eloquence of beauty, and she glides  
Into his darker musings, with a mild  
And healing sympathy, that steals away  
Their sharpness, ere he is aware. When  
thoughts

Of the last bitter hour come like a  
blight

Over thy spirit, and sad images

Of the stern agony, and shroud, and  
pall,

And breathless darkness, and the nar-  
row house,

Make thee to shudder and grow sick at  
heart;—

Go forth, under the open sky, and list  
To Nature's teachings——

So shalt thou rest, and what if thou with-  
draw

In silence from the living, and no friend  
Take note of thy departure? All that  
breathe

Will share thy destiny. The gay will  
laugh

When thou art gone, the solemn brood  
of care

Plod on, and each one as before will  
chase

His favorite phantom; yet all these shall  
leave

Their mirth and their employments, and  
shall come

And make their bed with thee. As the  
long train

Of ages glides away, the sons of men —  
The youth in life's fresh spring, and he  
who goes

In the full strength of years, matron,  
and maid,

The speechless babe, and the gray-  
headed man —

Shall one by one be gathered to thy  
side,

By those, who in their turn shall follow  
them.

. . . . .  
So live, that when thy summons comes to  
join

The innumerable caravan, which moves

To that mysterious realm, where each  
shall take  
His chamber in the silent halls of death,  
Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at  
night,  
Scourged to his dungeon, but sustained  
and soothed  
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy  
grave  
Like one who wraps the drapery of his  
couch  
About him, and lies down to pleasant  
dreams.

That last stanza perhaps has comforted, soothed, stirred, and sustained more troubled souls than even Henley's trumpet call "Invictus" or the highly contemporary effusions of Edmund Vance Cooke or Herbert Kaufman. But not to every taste or occasion will it prove most pleasing. Due enjoyment of poetry, as previously suggested, depends no little upon the reader's state of soul and mind.

Those popular favorites, Wordsworth's



"I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," Newman's "Lead, Kindly Light," and Wolfe's "Burial of Sir John Moore," with countless diversely touching poetic brethren, depend, for highest appreciation, on the spiritual or intellectual reactions of the reader, as do, indeed, hosts of more strictly formal poems. The fact is that formal poetry is to life and literature in general what the sonata is to music or sculpture is to art.

Formal poetry, to particularize, is the poetry of unusual or specially stressed occasions. One would not willingly spend entire days listening to Beethoven or Handel or Wagner, yet there are times when the lesser musicians fail utterly to interpret soul conditions, emotional attitudes, and strivings. To live in a sculpture gallery would seem to the majority exceedingly oppressive, but who has not found some single statue or group of statuary satisfying in the extreme? Thus it is, naturally enough, in the realms of verbal music and art.

When the glad spirit dances happily along life's highways and byways, then the time

for jocund songs and lightsome lyrics. When moods are tempestuous, the currents of thought or emotion too strong or resistless for the bounding shores of regular meter, then rhymeless poetry, free verse, has its season of delight and honor. When the rhythm of life is dainty, staccato, tripping, the pulsing *chante royale*, the delicate *triolet*, the quick-witted *vers de société* may be sure of warm welcome. When death, dramatic love, glory or other superlative passion absorbs the attention, then the formal, the classic poetry of greatness is enjoyed and understood. To each, in poetry as in all things, its own pure moment and mood.

The sonnet, for example, has been greatly wronged by too general misapprehension. Younglings naturally loving poetry are warned away from the sonnet as from something stiff and artificial. Men and women who would find in it no difficulty if unprejudiced, fight shy of the sonnet because it has been described to them as difficult of comprehension or construction. As a matter of fact, the sonnet is no more artificial or rigid in con-

struction than any other standard verse form if obediently followed. And the chiseled elegance of the sonnet has a high, profound beauty like that of a marble bust.

"A Shakespeare sonnet" sounds, perhaps, decidedly formal. The poetry reading beginner would not, it may be, feel especially drawn toward it. And yet—read

Love is not love

Which alters when it alteration finds,

or this, the eighteenth of those one hundred and fifty-four Shakespeare sonnets, those unsurpassable love poems, that attest the "cold" sonnet's possible amatory warmth and worth.

Shall I compare thee to a Summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate:

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,

And Summer's lease hath all too short a date:

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,

And often is his gold complexion  
dimmed;

And every fair from fair sometime declines,

By chance or nature's changing course  
untrimmed:

But thy eternal Summer shall not fade  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou  
owest;

Nor shall Death brag thou wanderest in  
his shade,

When in eternal lines to time thou growest:

So long as men can breathe, or eyes can  
see,

So long lives this, and this gives life to  
thee.

Or glance, for ripe expression of sonneted  
emotion of other, later order, over this jewel  
from Olive Tilford Dargan's tenderly tragic  
"Sonnets for One Drowned at Sea."

Today I went among the mountain folk  
To hear the gentle talk most dear to me.



I saw slow tears, and tenderness that  
woke

From sternest bed to light a lamp for  
thee.

And "Is it true?" hope asked and asked  
again,

And "It is true," was all that I could say,  
And pride rose over love to hide gray  
pain

As eyes tears might ungrace were turned  
away.

So much they loved thee I was half de-  
cayed

By human warmth, to feel thee near, but  
when

I put my hand out all the earth was void,  
And vanished even these near-weeping  
men.

Thus each new time I find that thou art  
gone,

Anew do I survive the world alone.

The realms of poetry, new and old alike,  
are rich in sonnets giving the melodic lie to  
all the old, depopularizing libels. It is but

necessary to read with an open mind to know this. The sonnet was a great favorite with those "great lovers," that "nest of singing birds," the Elizabethan poets. More than two thousand sonnets were written within the last ten years of the sixteenth century. Edmund Spenser in a single year composed fifty-eight sonnets celebrating his erotic experiences and emotions. Sir Philip Sidney wrote many besides that possibly best and best known of his productions, "With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb'st the Skies!" All down and along the poetic ages the sonnet has been treasured by those desiring to lend high or fine thought fitting poetic expression. Could better frame be provided chivalric loyalty than Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier"—"If I should die, think only this of me——" or John McCrae's "In Flanders' Fields," the recent swan songs and war sonnets that rendered their writers instantaneously, undyingly famous. The testimony of innumerable sonnets not only of carven correctness but widely beloved easily might be up-piled, arrayed.

The elegy, again, frequently has been ac-

cused of being too abstract, too remote to be loved or "understood of the common people." Why? Once more because of the traditional misbelief that it is ultra conventional, cold, set far apart from ordinary human thoughts and feelings and issues. Well might be offered, in opposing argument, these lines from Milton's "Lycidas," noblest of English elegiac works:

Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once  
more

Ye Myrtles brown, with Ivy never sere,  
I come to pluck your Berries harsh and  
crude,

And with forced fingers rude,  
Shatter your leaves before the mellow-  
ing year.

Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,  
Compel me to disturb your season due:  
For Lycidas is dead, dead in his prime,  
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his  
peer:

Who would not sing for Lycidas? he  
knew

Himself to sing, and build the lofty  
rhyme.

He must not float upon his watery  
bier

Unwept, and welter to the parching  
wind,

Without the meed of some melodious  
tear.

. . . . .

Now thou art gone, and never must re-  
turn!

Thee, Shepherd, thee the Woods, and  
desert Caves,

With wild Thyme and the gadding Vine  
o'ergrown,

And all their echoes mourn.

The Willows and the Hazel Copses  
green,

Shall now no more be seen,

Fanning their joyous Leaves to thy soft  
lays.

As killing as the Canker to the Rose,

Or Taint-worm to the weanling Herds  
that graze,



Or Frost to Flowers, that their gay  
wardrobe wear,  
When first the White-thorn blows;  
Such, Lycidas, thy loss to Shepherd's  
ear.

What is found here but timeless, world-wide feeling, natural as sympathetic, fittingly worded and but fitly tinged and flavored by the special thought and mode of Milton's time? What, in "Adonais," Shelley's lovely lament and elegy for Keats, but the universal, world-old love of comrade for comrade, all the deeper and richer for the wonderful poetic setting of expression and verbal frame?

I weep for Adonais — he is dead!  
Oh, weep for Adonais! though our  
tears  
Thaw not the frost which binds so  
dear a head!  
And thou, sad Hour, selected from all  
years  
To mourn our loss, rouse thy obscure  
compeers,

And teach them thine own sorrow.  
Say: "With me  
Died Adonais; till the Future dares  
Forget the Past, his fate and fame  
shall be  
An echo and a light unto eternity!"

. . . . .

Oh, weep for Adonais!—the quick  
Dreams,  
The passion-wingéd ministers of  
thought,  
Who were his flocks, whom near the  
living streams  
Of his young spirit he fed, and whom  
he taught  
The love which was its music, wander  
not—  
Wander no more, from kindling brain  
to brain,  
But droop there, whence they sprung;  
and mourn their lot  
Round the cold heart, where, after  
their sweet pain,

They ne'er will gather strength, or find  
a home again.

. . . . .  
He lives, he wakes—'tis Death is  
dead, not he;

Mourn not for Adonais—Thou  
young Dawn,

Turn all thy dew to splendor, for from  
thee

The spirit thou lamentest is not gone;  
Ye caverns and ye forests, cease to  
moan!

Cease, ye faint flowers and fountains,  
and thou Air,

Which like a mourning veil thy scarf  
hadst thrown

O'er the abandoned Earth, now leave  
it bare

Even to the joyous stars which smile on  
its despair!

He is made one with Nature: there is  
heard

His voice in all her music, from the  
moan

Of thunder, to the song of night's  
sweet bird;  
He is a presence to be felt and known  
In darkness and in light, from herb  
and stone,  
Spreading itself where'er that Power  
may move  
Which has withdrawn his being to its  
own;  
Which wields the world with never-  
wearied love,  
Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it  
above.

He is a portion of the loveliness  
Which once he made more lovely; he  
doth bear  
His part, while the one Spirit's plas-  
tic stress  
Sweeps through the dull dense world,  
compelling there,  
All new successions to the forms they  
wear;  
Torturing the unwilling dross that  
checks its flight



To his own likeness, as each mass may  
bear,  
And bursting in its beauty and its  
might  
From trees and beasts and men into the  
Heaven's light.

Who, with a sweet and early-dead friend and beloved in memory, spiritual vision, would not thrill responsive to the mighty music of the few quoted "Adonais" stanzas? The popular message of the poem is in no whit lessened because of its majestic rhythms, its harmonious rhymes, its sweeping, splendid swing. Gray's "Elegy," with its sweet succession of fine verses strung like rare pearls on a delicate thought-thread; Tennyson's "In Memoriam," with its unforgettable expression and strong if sentimental treatment of a tenderly hallowed subject; Stevenson's self-directed "Requiem," these are too well known, too well loved to need merest hint of quotation. Richard le Gallienne's "What of the Darkness?" dedicated to "the happy dead people," strikes a similar note.

What of the darkness? Is it very fair?  
Are there great calms? and find we silence there?

Like soft-shut lilies, all your faces glow  
With some strange peace our faces never know,

With some strange faith our faces never dare —

Dwells it in Darkness? Do you find it there?

Is it a Bosom where tired heads may lie?  
Is it a Mouth to kiss our weeping dry?  
Is it a Hand to still the pulse's leap?  
Is it a Voice that holds the runes of sleep?

Day shows us not such comfort anywhere —

Dwells it in Darkness? Do you find it there?

Out of the Day's deceiving light we call —

Day that shows man so great, and God so small,

That hides the stars, and magnifies the  
grass —

O is the Darkness too a lying glass!  
Or undistracted, do you find truth there?  
What of the Darkness? Is it very fair?

Is not the Eternal Question here asked so beautifully that the alarming elegiac feature of the poem is forgotten? Practically every human being, at some time, upon some occasion, must know how to read, to enjoy such setting. Even more modern, yet no less ageless, is the note of "A Club-Man's Requiem," Martha Gilbert Dickinson Bianchi's highly individual expression of a widely shared thought.

Warren has gone; and we who loved him  
best

Can't think of him as

"entered into rest."

But he has gone; has left the morning  
street,

The clubs no longer echo to his feet,  
Nor shall we see him lift his yellow wine

To pledge the random host—the purple  
vine.

At doors of other men his horses wait,  
His whining dogs scent false their master's  
fate;

His chafing yacht at harbor mooring lies;  
“Owner ashore,” her idle pennant flies.

Warren has gone —

Forsook the jovial ways  
Of winter nights—turned from his well-  
loved plays,

The dreams and schemes and deeds of busy  
brain,

And pensive habitations built in Spain.

Gone, with his ruddy hopes! And we who  
knew him best

Can't think of him as “entered into rest.”

So when the talk dies out or lights burn  
dim

We often ponder what is keeping him —

What destiny that all-subduing will,

That golden wit, that love of life, fulfil?

For we who silent smoke, who loved him  
best,

Can't fancy Warren “entered into rest.”



Closely akin to elegiac poetry, equally moving and natural, is that which celebrates the universal dread and dislike of growing old. Stoddard's graceful "The Flight of Youth" already has been quoted, but this no better expresses the feeling of average humanity when confronted by "the western slope" or even the first gray hair than does Longfellow's "*Morituri Salutamus*," with its artistic and comforting suggestions of a change not entirely sad.

But why, you ask me, should this tale  
be told

To men grown old, or who are growing  
old?

It is too late! Ah, nothing is too late  
Till the tired heart shall cease to palpi-  
tate.

. . . . .  
What then? Shall we sit idly down and  
say

The night hath come; it is no longer day?  
The night hath not yet come; we are not  
quite

Cut off from labor by the failing light;  
Something remains for us to do or dare;  
Even the oldest tree some fruit may  
bear.

. . . . .

For age is opportunity no less  
Than youth itself, though in another  
dress,  
And as the evening twilight fades away  
The sky is filled with stars, invisible by  
day.

Formal poetry? Yes, but of the kind that creeps close to the heartstrings. Only formal, like the commonplace but invaluable greeting "Good morning!" in custom and outline. Really as warmly human, as full of sempiternal human sympathy, comprehension and solace as Swinburne's "Hertha" or Wordsworth's "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality"—parts of which, incidentally, shall here serve as shining example of another much feared and maligned poetic form, the ode.

There was a time when meadow, grove,  
    and stream,  
The earth, and every common sight,  
    To me did seem  
    Apparelled in celestial light,  
The glory and the freshness of a dream.  
It is not now as it hath been of yore —  
    Turn whereso'er I may,  
    By night or day,  
The things which I have seen I now can  
    see no more.

The Rainbow comes and goes,  
And lovely is the Rose;  
The Moon doth with delight  
Look round her when the heavens are  
    bare;  
Waters on a starry night  
Are beautiful and fair;  
The sunshine is a glorious birth;  
But yet I know, where'er I go,  
That there hath passed away a glory  
    from the earth.

. . . . .

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;  
The Soul that rises with us, our life's

Star,

Hath had elsewhere its setting,

And cometh from afar:

Not in entire forgetfulness,

And not in utter nakedness,

But trailing clouds of glory do we come

From God who is our home:

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!

Shades of the prison-house begin to close

Upon the growing Boy,

But he beholds the light, and whence it  
flows,

He sees it in his joy;

The Youth, who daily farther from the  
East

Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,

And by the vision splendid

Is on his way attended;

At length the Man perceives it die away,

And fade into the light of common day.

. . . . .

O joy! that in our embers



Is something that doth live,  
That nature yet remembers  
What was so fugitive!  
The thought of our past years in me  
doth breed  
Perpetual benediction: not indeed  
For that which is most worthy to be  
blest —  
Delight and liberty, the simple creed  
Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,  
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in  
his breast —  
Not for these I raise  
The song of thanks and praise;  
But for those obstinate questionings  
Of sense and outward things,  
Fallings from us, vanishings;  
Blank misgivings of a Creature  
Moving about in worlds not realized,  
High instincts before which our mortal  
Nature  
Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised:  
But for those first affections,  
Those shadowy recollections,  
Which, be they what they may,

Are yet the fountain-light of all our  
day,

Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;

Uphold us, cherish, and have power  
to make

Our noisy years seem moments in the  
being

Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,

To perish never;

Which neither listlessness, nor mad en-  
deavor,

Nor Man nor Boy,

Nor all that is at enmity with joy,

Can utterly abolish or destroy!

Hence, in a season of calm weather,

Though inland far we be,

Our Souls have sight of that immortal  
sea

Which brought us hither,

Can in a moment travel thither

And see the children sport upon the  
shore,

And hear the mighty waters rolling ever-  
more.

. . . . .

And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills,  
and Groves,

Forbode not any severing of our  
loves!

Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your  
might;

I only have relinquished one delight  
To live beneath your more habitual  
sway.

I love the Brooks, which down their  
channels fret,

Even more than when I tripped lightly  
as they:

The innocent brightness of a new-born  
Day

Is lovely yet;

The Clouds that gather round the set-  
ting sun

Do take a sober coloring from an eye  
That hath kept watch o'er man's mor-  
tality;

Another race hath been, and other palms  
are won.

Thanks to the human heart by which we  
live,

Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and  
fears,  
To me the meanest flower that blows can  
give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for  
tears.

"An ode! That an ode?" one can hear certain surprised readers exclaiming. "Why, I thought an ode was something dry or deary or too classical for ordinary, everyday understanding or pleasure! And that's delightfully good stuff."

So it is, dear friend and fellow sufferer from too common poetic misapprehension, so it is, and so are hosts of other fine "formal" poems, to say nothing of the wide range of religious poetry that need only here be suggested, and of classic translations, ancient and modern, that need but to be known to be enjoyed.

Many a supposedly languid poetry student, induced to read poetry rightly, beginning in the right place, would find him or herself in the position of the Moliere character who



had talked prose all his life without knowing it. "Good stuff" and good reading—"just reading" as the astonished Morley critic remarked in an earlier chapter—abounds in poetry that, because of its hypothetically difficult character, comparatively seldom gets beyond the task-work of the high school senior or college freshman "specializing in English literature."

So read, it too often takes color, chameleon-like, from its surroundings and is mentally catalogued with the unhappy "skip" books of our childhood. Read as it might and should be, formal poetry would forge important links in the pleasure armor fortifying every normal human's soul.

## SPRING NIGHT

The park is filled with night and fog,  
The veils are drawn about the world,  
The drowsy lights along the paths  
Are dim and pearled.

Gold and gleaming the empty streets,  
Gold and gleaming the misty lake,  
The mirrored lights like sunken swords,  
Glimmer and shake.

Oh, is it not enough to be  
Here with this beauty over me?  
My throat should ache with praise, and I  
Should kneel in joy beneath the sky.  
Oh, beauty, are you not enough?  
Why am I crying after love  
With youth, a singing voice and eyes  
To take earth's wonder with surprise?  
Why have I put off my pride,  
Why am I unsatisfied,  
I for whom the pensive night

Binds her cloudy hair with light,  
I for whom all beauty burns  
Like incense in a million urns?  
Oh, beauty, are you not enough?  
Why am I crying after love?

—Sara Teasdale.

## CHAPTER VI

### NARRATIVE, DRAMATIC, AND DESCRIPTIVE POETRY

**N**ARRATIVE poetry, frequently listed among the least popular of its brethren, really is one of the most popular forms of poetic expression. It began with the earliest known races of humanity; it will continue while humanity inhabits the face of the globe.

Perennially declared dead, the narrative poem as perennially arises anew and refreshed to confound its unjust judges. From the primitive Anglo-Saxon "scop," who originated his poetic stories and songs as he delivered them, down through the professional or amateur gleeman who often repeated the story-poems of others, the ancient minstrels, the wandering ballad singers, and the medieval troubadours to such later narrative poets as Moore, Scott, Byron, Tennyson, Browning, Longfellow, Frost, Noyes, Massfield, Gibson, Howells, Lindsay, and Mas-



ters, the course of narrative poetry may be traced straight and true.

The same intent, the same spirit, moreover, has informed all these successive devotees of the poetic story. Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" and Masfield's "The Widow in the Bye-Street," Meredith's "Love in the Valley," Henry B. Fuller's "Lines Long and Short," Howells' "The Daughter of the Storage," and Tennyson's "Godiva" all are moved by the same springs, follow the same well recognized if not always clearly formulated natural and poetic laws.

The narrative poem, long or short, archaic or ultra-modern, romantic or adventurous, is eternally beloved of the people because it satisfies two instinctive desires or tastes—perhaps needs—of human nature. These are story-hunger and harmonic feeling. The mind is pleased by the narrative's progression, the senses stirred or soothed by cadences rhythmic or rhyming. The narrative poem, also, presents a concrete theme in a concrete way.

And just as human fondness always has

crowned the narrative poem, so, always, the narrative poem caters to the same aspects and instincts of general human nature. The narrative poem of the present day is precisely the same, allowing for due difference of time, customs, conventions, as the narrative poem of the middle ages. This, at least in part, accounts for the unchanging popularity of the great epics, such as the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," of the Scotch ballads out of which "Marmion" and "The Lady of the Lake" grew naturally, of "Hiawatha," "The Ancient Mariner," and "Lalla Rookh," of "The Idyls of the King," and the Norse sagas, of the Indian, East Indian, and oriental folk-tales and recitals, of all the semi-historic, semi-romantic lyrics and legends of all the human kindred and races and tongues.

Infants, as has been said before, delight in rhyme, especially the rhyme that shapes itself into a story. What natural child prefers not a Mother Goose rhyme, a jingle, to a plain prose statement of fact?

Infant races, as also has been said before, delight in the rhyming story, the narrative

poem. Witness the popularity of the tribal singer, the oriental story teller, the minstrel in all ages and climes.

Growing and fully grown infants never quite outgrow the love for the rhyming story, nor do growing and fully grown races and nations. War poems — poems of war heroes — are as dear to the heart of humanity now as during the Wars of the Roses, the period of the Norman Conquest, the Viking era or those far, fair, poetry-haloed days of early Greece and Rome.

Narrative poems, to particularize lightly, are almost as varied in kind, form, and nature as prose narratives, or as human nature. Briefly, they range themselves into the heroic or romantic poem story of the primitive or Middle Ages; the realistic poem story, of blank verse, free verse or rhyming order, that, under different titles and grades of appreciation, has come down from the dawn-days of mankind's beginning; the short and simple story-lyric; and the episodic poem story or poem story in little, in miniature, that is as typically and almost solely characteristic

of America as the episodic prose short story so dear to the American heart.

Perhaps the best, as one of the best known, examples of this variety of poem is Edwin Arlington Robinson's "Richard Cory," a psychological-dramatic story interpretation that for force, vitality, vivid depiction and nutshell terseness scarce could further go.

Mr. Robinson in "Flammonde" tells another, longer rhyming story that, as with "Richard Cory," is avidly devoured by men and women wont, as a rule, to assert that "poetry makes no appeal to me.

The man Flammonde, from God knows  
where,  
With firm address and foreign air —  
With news of nations in his talk  
And something royal in his walk —  
With glint of iron in his eyes,  
But never doubt, nor yet surprise,  
Appeared, and stayed, and held his head  
As one by kings accredited

until, by sheer force of personality, he had transformed a tight little American town



through enlargement of its vision. Flammonde serves as hero — intensely real though always with that strange, haunting sense of the remote about his vivid chronicle — of another almost exclusively American story type, the type that indicates rather than actually tells the embodied story. A suggestive poem-sketch of very different key and tenor but endowed with the same half-hinted vitality is Zona Gale's "Mother."

I wish I had said more. So long, so long  
About your simple tasks I watched you,  
    dear;

I knew you craved the word you did not  
    hear.

I knew your spirit, brave and chaste and  
    strong,

Was wistful that it might not do the  
    wrong;

And all its wistfulness and all its fear  
Were in your eyes whenever I was  
    near.

And yet you always went your way with  
    song.

All prodigal of smiles for other eyes  
I led my life. At last there came a day  
When with some careless word I turned  
away

From what you fashioned for a sweet  
surprise.

Ah, now it is too late for me to pour  
My vase of myrrh — would God I had  
said more!

Charles Hanson Towne's delicate poem-sketch "It Rained All Day" enshrines another mother in just this same loving penumbra of faintly shadowed glory and grace.

It rained all day, the day she died,  
And yet she thought it sweet and fair;  
She said the sunshine kissed her hair,  
And then she slept, all satisfied.

It rained all day: She woke again  
And whispered that the sky was blue.  
Ah me! Thank God she never knew  
How cold and dreary fell the rain.

So like her life! It rained all day,  
And yet she thought it all was bright;  
She loved and toiled all day and night —  
She never thought the skies were gray.

And in the compressed beauty of Jessie B. Rittenhouse's "Paradox" may not an entire tragedy of the emotions be found?

I went out to the woods today  
To hide away from you,  
From you a thousand miles away —  
But you came, too.

And yet the old dull thought would stay,  
And all my heart benumb —  
If you were but a mile away  
You would not come.

Certain of Edgar Lee Masters' poems, notably many of those in the "Anthology," are true narrative poems in that through their few and seemingly slight strokes the progress of a whole life may be noted. An earlier, less sharply cut narrative poem is Words-

worth's "Lucy," which gently, sweetly, tells the story of a lovely little life from start to close. The three stanzas herewith quoted have been beloved by countless dissimilar humans; in all probability they will be remembered and quoted long after the writer's "Wanderer," "Yarrow Visited," "Yarrow Revisited," and other far more pretentious poems have gone the way of all flesh and song.

She dwelt among the untrodden ways,  
Beside the springs of Dove,  
A maid whom there were none to praise  
And very few to love:

A violet by a mossy stone  
Half hidden from the eye!  
Fair as a star, when only one  
Is shining in the sky.

She lived unknown, and few could know  
When Lucy ceased to be;  
But she is in her grave, and oh,  
The difference to me!



An interesting vista of poetic study and conjecture is opened by comparison of "Lucy" with Browning's "Evelyn Hope" —

Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead,  
Sit and watch by her side an hour —

another superlatively tender, simple, and loving life-study of a sweet young girl.

For contrasting example of that which might be called the "grand manner" in regard to narrative poetry may be instanced Meredith's "Love in the Valley"—that long and colorful poem so splendid in substance and style.

Tennyson's narrative poems, "Locksley Hall," "Godiva," "In the Children's Hospital," "The North Countryman," "Rizpah," etc., are better known, perhaps, than almost any other modern narrative poems, and they, too, occasionally partake of the grand manner. In marked contrast, and even more musical, is the simple, singing verse, rioting in rhyme as a flowering plant in blos-

soms, of Alfred Noyes. Noyes is at his best, perhaps, in "The Barrel Organ" and "In Old Japan." Of the former, in one sense rather a descriptive than a true narrative poem, in another truest narrative poem in that it tells the whole story of a city, a generously appetizing excerpt shall be given here.

There's a barrel-organ caroling across a  
golden street,  
In the City as the sun sinks low;  
And the music's not immortal; but the  
world has made it sweet  
And fulfilled it with the sunset glow.  
And it pulses through the pleasure of  
the City and the pain  
That surrounds the singing organ like  
a large eternal light;  
And they've given it a glory and a part  
to play again  
In the Symphony that rules the day  
and night.

Yes; as the music changes,  
Like a prismatic glass,

It takes the light and ranges  
Through all the moods that pass;  
Dissects the common carnival  
Of passions and regrets,  
And gives the world a glimpse of all  
The colors it forgets.

. . . . .  
Go down to Kew in lilac-time, in lilac-  
time, in lilac-time;  
Go down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far  
from London!)  
And you shall wander hand in hand with  
love in summer's wonderland;  
Go down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far  
from London!)

The cherry-trees are seas of bloom and  
soft perfume and sweet perfume,  
The cherry-trees are seas of bloom (and  
oh, so near to London!)  
And there they say, when dawn is high  
and all the world's a blaze of sky  
The cuckoo, though he's very shy, will  
sing a song for London.

The nightingale is rather rare and yet  
they say you'll hear him there  
At Kew, at Kew in lilac-time (and oh, so  
near to London!)

The linnet and the throstle, too, and  
after dark the long halloo  
And golden-eyed tu-whit, tu-whoo of  
owls that ogle London.

. . . . .  
There's a thief, perhaps, that listens  
with a face of frozen stone,  
In the City as the sun sinks low;  
There's a portly man of business with a  
balance of his own,  
There's a clerk and there's a butcher of  
a soft, reposeful tone,  
And they're all of them returning to the  
heavens they have known;  
They are crammed and jammed in  
busses and—they're each of them  
alone  
In the land where the dead dreams go.

There's a very modish woman and her  
smile is very bland,



In the City as the sun sinks low;  
And her hansom jingles onward, but her  
    little jeweled hand  
Is clenched a little tighter and she cannot understand  
What she wants or why she wanders to  
    that undiscovered land,  
For the parties there are not at all the  
    sort of thing she planned,  
In the land where the dead dreams go.

. . . . .

There's a laborer that listens to the  
    voices of the dead  
In the City as the sun sinks low;  
And his hand begins to tremble and his  
    face is rather red  
As he sees a loafer watching him and —  
    there he turns his head  
And stares into the sunset where his  
    April love is fled,  
For he hears her softly singing and his  
    lonely soul is led  
Through the lands where the dead  
    dreams go.

There's an old and hardened demi-rep,  
it's ringing in her ears,  
In the City as the sun sinks low;  
With the wild and empty sorrows of the  
love that blights and sears,  
Oh, and if she hurries onward, then be  
sure, be sure she hears,  
Hears and bears the bitter burden of the  
unforgotten years,  
And her laugh's a little harsher and her  
eyes are brimmed with tears  
For the land where the dead dreams  
go.

There's a barrel-organ caroling across a  
golden street  
In the City as the sun sinks low;  
Though the music's only Verdi there's a  
world to make it sweet  
Just as yonder sunset where the earth  
and heaven meet  
Mellows all the sooty City! Hark, a  
hundred thousand feet  
Are marching on to glory through the  
poppies and the wheat



Here is no hapless innocence waylaid.  
This is a stolid worker at her trade.  
Listening, she yawns; half smiling, undismayed,  
Shrugging a little at the law's delay,  
Bored and impatient to be on her way.  
It is her eighth conviction. Out beyond  
the rail  
A lady novelist in search of types turns  
pale.

She meant to write of them just as she  
found them,  
And with no tears or maudlin glamor  
round them,  
In forceful, virile words, harsh, true  
words, without shame,  
Calling an ugly thing, boldly, an ugly  
name;  
Sympathy, velvet glove, on purpose, iron  
hand.  
But *eighth conviction!* All the phrases  
she had planned  
Fail; "sullen," "vengeful," no, she isn't  
that.



No, the pink face beneath the hectic hat  
Gives back her own aghast and sickened  
stare

With a detached and rather cheerful air,  
And then the little novelist sees red.  
From her chaste heart all clemency is  
fled.

“Oh, loathsome! venomous! Off with  
her head!

*Call* Rose Costara!” But before you  
stop,

And shelve your decent rage,  
Let's call the cop.

Let's call the plain-clothes cop who  
brought her in.

The weary-eyed night watchman of the  
law,

A shuffling person with a hanging jaw,  
Loose-lipped and sallow, rather vague  
of chin,

Comes rubber-heeling at his Honor's  
rap.

He set and baited and then sprung the  
trap—

The *trap*—by his unsavory report.  
 Let's ask him why—but first  
                     Let's call the court.

Not only the grim figure in the chair,  
 Sphinx-like above the waste and wreck-  
     age there,  
 Skeptical, weary of a retold tale,  
 But the whole humming hive, the false,  
     the frail—

An old young woman with a weasel face,  
 A lying witness waiting in his place,  
 Two ferret lawyers nosing out a case,  
 Reporters questioning a Mexican,  
 Sobbing her silly heart out for her man,  
 Planning to feature her, "lone, desper-  
     ate, pretty—"

Yes, call the court. But wait!  
                     Let's call the city.

Call the community! Call up, call down,  
 Call all the speeding, mad, unheeding  
     town!  
 Call rags and tags and then call velvet  
     gown!

Go, summon them from tenements and  
clubs,  
On office floors and over steaming tubs!  
Shout to the boxes and behind the  
scenes,  
Then to the push-carts and the limou-  
sines!  
Arouse the lecture-room, the cabaret!  
Confound them with a trumpet-blast and  
say,  
“Are you so dull, so deaf and blind in-  
deed,  
That you mistake the harvest for the  
seed?”  
Condemn them for — but stay!  
Let's call the code —

The facile thing they've fashioned to  
their mode:  
Smug sophistries that smother and be-  
fool,  
That numb and stupefy; that clumsy  
thing  
That measures mountains with a three-  
foot rule,

And plumbs the ocean with a pudding-  
string—  
The little, brittle code. Here is the  
root,  
Far out of sight, and buried safe and  
deep,  
And Rose Costara is the bitter fruit.  
On every limb and leaf, death, ruin,  
creep.

So, lady novelist, go home again.  
Rub biting acid on your little pen.  
Look back and out and up and in, and  
then  
Write that it is no job for pruning-  
shears.  
Tell them to dig for years and years and  
years  
The twined and twisted roots. Blot out  
the page;  
Invert the blundering order of the age;  
Reverse the scheme: the last shall be the  
first.  
Summon the system, starting with the  
worst—



The lying, dying code! On, down the  
line,  
The city, and the court, the cop. Assign  
The guilt, the blame, the shame! Sting,  
lash, and spur!  
Call each and all! Call us! And *then*  
call her!

Who, with a heart to feel, a mind to think, a soul to strain at its leashing conventions, could help being moved by such a poem, whether or no previously arrayed against poetry in the abstract? Leaving these, with inevitable memory of Hood's tragic "Bridge of Sighs," Florence Wilkinson's "The Flower Makers," and kindred stirring themes of the city; with Masfield's "The Daffodil Fields" and Robert Frost's New England story-poems to perform similarly suggestive service in behalf of the poetic realism of less metropolitan regions: let us think, for a moment, of those romantic poems, both of previous and the present era, that are so closely akin to poetic drama.

The "Canterbury Tales," the Arthurian

poem-legends, the Icelandic Sagas, are all, of course, impossible of present reproduction as the folk-songs of our own Red Indians — although the reader sickened with war, bored by business, and wearily longing for genuine intellectual refreshment is earnestly recommended to them; but poem-stories like Byron's "Manfred," Hogg's "Kilmeny" and Scott's "Marmion," to say nothing of such present-day kin as sundry Kipling tale-ballads and Masfield's "Dauber," are rich in the quickening qualities of stirring event and rapid action that most of us, whether in prose or poetry, greatly prize. Actual dramas, even though in poetic form strictly belonging to poetry's sister art of the theater, need not now receive attention, but the dramatic poems instanced, with others by John G. Neihardt, Lindsay, and countless contemporary and classic poets at least will bridge the friendly chasm for those who would follow poetry across the narrow border to the poem-drama realm.

To this realm the Browning classics, too well known to need even passing mention,

and such contemporary specimens as Masefield's "Philip the King," Lily A. Long's "Radisson," and Josephine Preston Peabody's incomparable "The Piper," with poetic-dramatic fantasies such as Cloyd Head's "Grotesques" and the queer "Mines" of Alfred Kreymborg, will provide delightful introduction. Again such herotales as Masefield's "Rosas" and Noyes' "Drake" may well be employed in the friendly capacity of bridge.

Since practically every poet of distinction has done good work in the way of poetic description, natural, imaginative or psychologic; since lines, stanzas, poems, must spring at will to the memory of almost every reader; and since indication rather than technical showing forth is the present object, descriptive poetry, as such alone, shall not now be directly analyzed or considered. Plentiful example has occurred in connection with other poetic phases. Apt and fascinating quotation might run on forever. But few, surely, could conclude this bird's-eye glimpse of the picked poetic area without conscious

impulsion to make this wide and fascinating area their own.

Let those uncertain as to just what kind of poetic fare will prove most pleasing begin with the simpler, more dramatic or descriptive narrative poems that have proved such long and sterling friends to other readers. From such beginning has dawned and dated many a strong love of poetry in all its many forms.





## IN FLANDERS' FIELDS

In Flanders' fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders' fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from falling hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies blow  
In Flanders' fields.

—JOHN MCCRAE.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE CASE FOR THE DEFENSE

**H**ERE, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter:

Everybody should read poetry.

Why?

Because everybody loves it. (For particulars see Chapter I.)

Again, why?

Because everybody loves, needs, desires, seeks enjoyment, and the reading of poetry, properly performed and pursued, makes for universal enjoyment of high, rich, rare, inexpensive, highly diversified, never-ending and ever-vernal order. (For further particulars see Chapter II.)

How, then, to extract this enjoyment from poetry, to cause poetry reading to yield its rare treasures in plain and painless manner, in a word, "How to Read Poetry?"

Why, good sir or madam, perfectly simple and easy. Read poetry just as you would

bathe or dress or write a letter or eat your dinner or play golf or take a car down town.

Suit the action to the time, the food to the appetite, the clothing to the weather, the poetry to the mood, the nature, the taste.

If you like "old" poetry, read "old" poetry and don't be ashamed to admit that you like and read it.

If you prefer "new" poetry, read that and don't be ashamed of reading it, either.

If you naturally enjoy standard poetry of grave or classic order, so much the better; you have much to enjoy and may rejoice in a life supply of the preferred poetic dainty.

If your taste runs to the simplest of verse, to tender love lyrics, the least impressive of "home and mother" jingles, the most primitive of war songs or "poems of passion," why, have you not still great cause for rejoicing? You are indubitably fortunate in that the supply always will more than equal the demand.

If you like poetry of all kinds, read poetry of all kinds and don't think the case requires apology, explanation, nor any attention other



than matter-of-fact, pleased and natural acceptance. Why should one deprecate or explain intellectual, emotional likings any more than physical appetites in the way of food or drink?

In a word, once more, read whatever poetry you like, and if you don't think you really like any begin at once to experiment, to read all kinds until you discover—as you surely will sooner or later and probably sooner—which kind you like best. (For encouraging assistance read Chapters III, IV, v, and VI.)

But don't, as you would do yourself justice, read Byron when your soul hungers for spiritual sustenance, nor Keats with the war-guns roaring, nor Masters when you long to be stirred or stimulated or soothed. The music of a pipe organ, remember, is admirably fitted for inspiring or encouraging religious meditation, but it is not well suited to quickstep marching or the dancing of a fandango; a fife and drum corps, similarly, would provide but a poor lullaby or waltz measure. There are times when Noyes'

lovely lilting cloys the stiffened senses like honey, when the rhythmic realism of Sandburg is maddening, the Tennysonian sentimentality quite too much to bear.

In a word, yet once more, read poetry with reason, with the invaluable support of this chapter, and, in addition, with the aid of this (softly whispered) watchword and secret:

*Use Your Common Sense.*

## THE HAPPIEST HEART

Who drives the horses of the sun  
Shall lord it but a day;  
Better the lowly deed were done,  
And kept the humble way.

The rust will find the sword of fame,  
The dust will hide the crown;  
Ay, none shall nail so high his name  
Time will not tear it down.

The happiest heart that ever beat  
Was in some quiet breast  
That found the common daylight sweet,  
And left to Heaven the rest.

—JOHN VANCE CHENEY.

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